

Dear City Council Members,

I am testifying as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Baltimore to ask that you divest \$100M from the over-half-billion-dollar Baltimore Police Department budget and encourage the Mayor to redirect those funds to transparent and accountable community-led solutions that address the root causes of crime. In addition, I ask that you advocate for the creation of a trust that communities can dictate where and how the money is reinvested.

I am a community leader in Upper Fells Point, who has lived here for six years. I have been a member of the Upper Fells Point Improvement Association board, and have helped organize my neighbors around issues of equity, transportation, and community safety. SURJ works in collaboration with the Campaign for Justice, Safety, and Jobs.

Baltimore spends more of its General Fund on the Baltimore Police Department than it does on schools, housing, violence prevention initiatives, substance abuse treatment, and rec and parks combined. This was shown in high contrast a few weeks ago when Michael Foote died in the Canton Waterfront Park. In his last weeks of life, he had to beg Councilman Zeke Cohen to have the park bathrooms opened for him to use, all while he lived in a tent next to them.

The bottom line is that Mr Foote was more likely to have the city send a person with a badge and a gun to hassle him than they were to send someone to help him with his critical needs: having a place to use the bathroom, and a safe bed to sleep in.

In fact, Baltimore City is contributing less to 'Permanent Housing for the Homeless' this year than they did even in 2018. The amount of the general fund going to that category is dropping from \$736k in 2018 to \$256k in 2022. The fact that we are contributing such a paltry amount of our money to housing the homeless, while we throw another \$25 million on the dumpster fire that is the Baltimore Police Department shows exactly what we value.

It is for these reasons that I ask you to divest \$100M from the Baltimore Police Department budget and redirect those funds to transparent and accountable community-led solutions that address the root causes of crime, including a trust that communities can dictate where and how the money is reinvested.

Additionally, as a member of SURJ Baltimore I stand in solidarity with Baltimore Safe Haven in their demands for financial support for LGBTQ folks experiencing homelessness, access to a building from the city, grant funds for trans-led orgs to provide direct services, and the creation of an LGBTQ office in city hall.

Finally, we believe that after over a million dollars spent, two mistrials, and two overturned guilty verdicts, that the relentless over-prosecution of Keith Davis Jr. has not made this city safer and only wasted precious resources that could be use saving the lives of many Baltimoreans, rather than ruining the life of one man and his family. We ask you do everything in your power to call on Marilyn Mosby and the Baltimore State's Attorney Office to drop the charges against Keith Davis Jr. and not continue with a fifth trial.

Thank you for your time.

Brian Seel
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