

Good evening staff & members of the City Council,

My name is Onyinye and I live in Upton. Last year we all bore witness to an **international** uprising in which people took to the streets to demand that we defund the police. In this year alone over 350 people have been killed by police officers, including children like Ma'Khia Bryant in Ohio and Alex Toledo in Chicago. The majority of victims of police murder are black and latino people. **It could not be clearer that policing is a public health hazard.** The proposed \$27 mill increase overshadows the measly \$21 mil you cut from the budget last year. I support the demand for a 100 mill dollar decrease in BPDs budget and a gradual and complete dismantling of the department, as we build alternative structures.

**Policing and incarceration do not keep us safe!** There have been many studies showing that adequate education, stable affordable housing, a living wage, and access to health services are better at reducing and preventing violence and harm than police or prisons.<sup>1</sup> Ten years ago, the city had the lowest homicide rate we've seen since the 1970s and the police budget wasn't even half of what is being proposed for the 2022 fiscal year. Each year the police budget increases and each year the homicide rate hits a new record, even as our city population continues to plummet.

On it's own the amount of money being spent on policing is ridiculous, but when compared to the amount being spent on other necessities, it is even more absurd. We are spending pennies and dimes on the dollar for fundamental services compared to what we give to a department that has demonstrated its inability to prevent harm in our communities including gun violence, intimate partner violence, opioid overdose, hunger, homelessness, and other social ailments. **We do not want more money for police pensions and benefits.** We want our tax dollars to be used to address very dire problems our communities face, particularly in East, West and South Baltimore, where many people are struggling and live impacted by economic and social disinvestment.

Spending on law enforcement and our criminal legal system dramatically outpaces spending on community services such as housing, education, and violence prevention programs. Those are the institutions that build safe, thriving, healthy communities. The same consent decree that was institutued to hold our police accountable in the wake of Freddy Gray's murder has been used to justify increased police spending. **Instead of continuing to funnel money to BPD for perks and retirement, we can use that money to fund our schools & childcare, develop and strengthen mobile crisis services, peer counseling services, and crisis hotlines, fund conflict mediation programs, build deeply affordable housing, fund eviction prevention programs, create avenues for community land stewardship, protect the city's many community gardens, increase services**

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<sup>1</sup>Doug McVay, Vincent Schiraldi, and Jason Ziedenberg, "Treatment or Incarceration? National and State Findings on the Efficacy and Cost Savings of Drug Treatment versus Imprisonment, Justice Policy Institute, January 2004, [http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/04-01\\_rep\\_mdtreatmentorincarceration\\_ac-dp.pdf](http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/04-01_rep_mdtreatmentorincarceration_ac-dp.pdf); Steven Hawkins, "Education vs. Incarceration," The American Prospect, December 6, 2010, <http://prospect.org/article/education-vs-incarceration>; Lance Lochner and Enrico Moretti, "The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self-Reports," October 2003, <http://eml.berkeley.edu/~moretti/lm46.pdf>; 27; "Housing and Public Safety," Justice Policy Institute, November 1, 2007, [http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/07-11\\_rep\\_housingpublicsafety\\_ac-ps.pdf](http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/07-11_rep_housingpublicsafety_ac-ps.pdf); 1.

**for immigrants, fix our roads, implement a zero waste plan and a number of other measures which address the city's true needs.**

To proceed with this budget tells us that you do not care about the needs and demands of the people. If you want to create more trauma in the city, by all means keep funding (and overspending on) the police. If you want to create holistically healthy and safe communities, it's time to make some transformative changes including creating a community wellness trust fund & pivoting to a participatory budget that allows for determination of budget priorities by and for the people.

Thank you,  
Onyinye Alheri  
Upton