

Taxpayer Night's Night for City Budget FY22

Written Testimony submitted by Baltimore City resident Sarah D'Adamo

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To Mayor Scott and the Baltimore City Council:

The proposed FY22 city budget extensively details how it will dedicate part of the city's general fund to expanding and improving policing in a wide range of forms, under the heading of "public safety". This term is much disputed, as you likely know, in part because we have for so long and so extensively been funding police over and above any other kinds of public resources for meeting the welfare and safety needs of our city's population. It has become true that public safety = security culture, or the police, because that is the only system our governments actually invest in, even though security culture is actually much more focused on property protection than protecting the safety of citizens. We have years of indicting accounts and reports of police abuse of citizens in Baltimore city -- sexual abuse and rape, false criminalization and recriminalization, brutal physical violence, evidence manipulation and other kinds of flagrant deception, excessive targeting of poor Black populations and people who are unhoused and otherwise in need of services, etc etc. This is a vision of safety at the direct cost of people who most need social support. It is actively harmful. As a citizen of Baltimore, I will not accept the use of the city's general fund, which is derived from taxing our citizenry, to further terrorize and harm the most vulnerable people in our city, and to perpetuate the existing way of doing things. Adding MORE money may sound like it will make the BPD's systems stronger and more efficient, and perhaps it could make them a stronger and more efficient force of control and criminalization in the city. But why would we desire that? It will definitely NOT address any of the other areas of social duress in our city, which can only see transformation with a heavy influx of resources.

A few facts to bring this home:

The BPD has consistently received an outsized percentage of the city's general fund (26% in the FY22 preliminary budget), compared to community investment priorities, such as funding for public schools (14%), housing and development (2%), substance abuse and mental health (0.1%), recreation and parks (2%) and the Office of Homeless Services (1%).

Baltimore spends \$904 a year per citizen on policing

New York spends \$672

Chicago spends \$624

Detroit spends \$493

Atlanta spends \$490

LA spends \$436

I demand that the FY22 budget be amended before final review: we still must defund this excessive, rotten police department, we still must do better, for George Floyd, Korryn Gaines, Tyrone West, Keith Davis, and a maddening, growing number of other victims of police. To

pursue an amendment, I support Black community activists in Baltimore in their call for the creation of a Community Wellness trust fund alongside defunding BPD, and their demand for the removal of police entirely from responses to mental health distress, substance use, sex work, homelessness and other quality-of-life issues. Baltimore must try to lead in some other indicator than corruption and extremely heavy policing of its citizens -- try harder.

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