

Dear Members of the City Council,

Thank you for taking the time to hear from your constituents on our budget. 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 redirect those funds to transparent and accountable community-led solutions that address the root causes of crime. In addition, I ask that you create a trust for communities to dictate where and how the money is reinvested.

I am writing to you as a resident of Charles Village, a four-year Baltimorean, a water justice advocate, and a new member of the SURJ leadership team. SURJ Baltimore organizes white people across the city to take action on racial justice, and works in collaboration with the Campaign for Justice, Safety, and Jobs.

Months after I moved to Baltimore, I realized that my nextdoor neighbor had been stalking me. One day he said hi to me as I was walking to my door. We chatted about the neighborhood for a minute, and he told me he was a bail bondsman. After a brief yet disconcerting conversation about his view on proposals to end cash bail, he told me that he didn't want to talk to me about "all that." He had come to ask me to go out to get drinks with him. I was a bit surprised, mostly because I suspected he was at least 30 years older than me. I said nothing, so he kept talking. He told me that his desk is in a window that faces towards my door, and that he had been watching me come and go from my apartment for a while, but I always moved "too quickly" for him. He commented on how often he saw me come home in gym clothes, and that he had been playing my license plate number as his lottery numbers for a while - but hadn't won anything yet.

I am unsure if I said anything during this exchange, as I was processing that I had just told this man exactly where I lived, that I lived alone - and now, he had just told me that he was keeping an eye on my routine, and my car. He gave me his business card for his bail bonds business, and told me to get in touch. I didn't.

A few months later, I ran into him on the way to the grocery store. He asked why I hadn't called him, and if I remembered what he did for a living. I could not forget that he was a bail bondsman, and once I replied he said "You know what that means, right? That means I have access to bounty hunters, and if you don't call me, I'm going to send one of them after you." Then he laughed, but in a way that made me feel like it was less of a joke.

This really scared me - it may have been a terrible joke, but I felt threatened. Women regularly face retaliation for rejecting men. I called a crisis hotline, explained everything that had happened, and that he was a bail bondsman, so I didn't want to call the police because it seemed probable that he could be professionally connected or friendly with police officers. They told me that they didn't know what else I could do, and that I should just call the police and see what happens.

As a white woman, this was the first time I experienced the gut feeling of knowing that getting police involved could actually put me at even more risk. I now know from the GTTF investigation that bail bondsmen can in fact be quite close with police officers. I didn't know many people in Baltimore yet, I was terrified in my own home, and had to figure out how to protect myself without any institutional support. I was able to take action to stop this harassment, but didn't feel fully safe until I had moved out from that apartment. There are other stories like mine, and not all will turn out ok. Most importantly, I know that this is how BIPOC community members in Baltimore feel every day, facing regular harassment and well documented excessive, brutal and violent policing. Yet because we have so badly underfunded and undervalued forms of social service and aid, meanwhile maintaining a steady and sizable flow of cash to BPD, people have nowhere to go when they need real support.

That is why 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 so that communities can dictate where and how the money is reinvested. We must recognize and respect that for so many communities, police do not bring remedy-- and because we have invested so much in the police force while neglecting other key social services, people simply have no path to remedy when in need.

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.

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