



GREATER BALTIMORE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA TESTIMONY ON DEFUNDING THE BPD TO REINVEST IN COMMUNITY SAFETY IN FY22 BUDGET

Dear Members of the City Council,

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) is a 50,000-member strong political organization, formed in 1982¹, that seeks to end the exploitative and oppressive grip capitalism holds over humanity by allowing the economy and society to be democratically controlled². Our driving goal as socialists is to ensure people, primarily the working class, are valued as the most integral catalysts of society, rather than profit margins or the whims of corporate elites.

Since January 2017, the Greater Baltimore (GBDSA) chapter has organized around numerous issues in Baltimore, such as equity in mass transit, labor and workers' rights, Medicare for All, racial justice, canvassed for electoral candidates, and most recently, stood in solidarity with the Hopkins Coalition Against ICE and Students Against Private Police. As socialists, *"We can no longer abide the oppression waged on Black people at the hands of a white supremacist, misogynist, imperialist, and capitalist police state...We acknowledge abolition as the path forward. Through abolition and reparations, resources must be given to communities most deeply impacted by racism and policing"*³ In keeping with these values, we firmly support measures to transform Baltimore by reallocating funding from the BPD, advancing harm reduction by investing in community safety – fully funding affordable housing, eradicating homelessness, strengthening and enhancing the quality of public education, providing workforce development and catering to the needs of returning citizens, ensuring viable employment opportunities exist throughout the city, and securing our children's futures by prioritizing youth development and enriching recreation center programming.

Baltimore has failed to process the multifaceted political lessons emerging from Freddie Gray's untimely death and subsequent Uprising that followed six years ago. The police budget remains the largest component of the City budget funded on a discretionary basis, ballooning in recent decades, with police spending increasing by 173% between 1965 and 2005.⁴ Police spending has escalated, even as the city's

¹ "A History of Democratic Socialists of America 1971-2017." www.dsausa.org, Democratic Socialists of America, www.dsausa.org/about-us/history/.

² "What Is Democratic Socialism?" www.dsausa.org, Democratic Socialists of America, www.dsausa.org/about-us/what-is-democratic-socialism/.

³ DSA. (2020, June 15). *DSA Supports #8 to Abolition*. Retrieved April 20, 2021, from <https://www.dsausa.org/statements/dsa-supports-8toabolition/>

⁴ Analysis by the Vera Institute of Justice, United States Census Bureau, Historical Data (formerly Special 60). Data available at: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/gov-finances/data/historical-data.html>.



population has endured a steep decline, at a rate of 32% - 939,024 in 1960 to 640,064 in 2005 to 593,490 in 2019.⁵

Policing consistently reinforces systemic oppression and foments the exact opposite of public safety in many of our communities. The American Public Health Association has designated police violence as a public health crisis in the United States, *“Physical and psychological violence that is structurally mediated by the system of law enforcement results in deaths, injuries, trauma, and stress,”* disproportionately affecting, *“...marginalized populations (e.g., people of color, immigrants, individuals experiencing houselessness, people with disabilities, the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Queer (LGBTQ) community, individuals with mental illness, people who use drugs, and sex workers).”*⁶ The public health implications of policing are complicated by Baltimore’s pervasive trend of institutionalized racism and segregation, giving rise to tranquility and prosperity for residents of the White L, while death and terror are a routine way of life in the Black Butterfly.

Instead of fully engaging in or respecting the communities they purport to serve, members of law enforcement have exploited, destabilized, and terrorized the districts to which they are assigned – defending property and capital before our collective humanity. History reminds us that American policing originates from the state’s desire to capture formerly enslaved people of African descent, who escaped the generational nightmare of the plantation, and to defend property.⁷ Baltimoreans yearn for transformation, as so many communities have become accustomed to remaining hopeless, living in communities left dilapidated as a result of City leadership consistently choosing gentrification and corporate development to realize social progress, instead of concerted investment in the people who comprise its heart.

GBDSA urges you, as members of the Board of Estimates, to remember our children’s uncharted futures as the fiscal budget for 2022 is considered. Baltimore must courageously acknowledge the inadequacies of policing by fully funding its communities, investing in high quality educational facilities and programs for students, affordable housing, affirming healthcare as a human right, championing a living wage and promoting the dignity of workers, ending homelessness, and safeguarding the aspirations of all residents – regardless of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, religion, or national origin. Defunding the BPD, to refund Baltimore’s future, is the first step in realizing a new paradigm for community safety.

⁵ “Baltimore, Maryland Population History, 1840-2019,” accessed February 24, 2021, <https://www.biggestuscities.com/city/baltimore-maryland>.

⁶ Beller, S. (2018, November 18). The American Public Health Association Declares Police Violence a Public Health Issue. Retrieved April 21, 2021, from <https://filtermag.org/the-american-public-health-association-declares-police-violence-a-public-health-issue/>

⁷ Gourevitch, A. (2020, June 12). Why Are the Police Like This? Retrieved April 21, 2021, from <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/06/police-united-states-strikebreaking-class-war>



Respectfully submitted,

Greater Baltimore Democratic Socialists of America