



545 West 10th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C.
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Friday, July 24 2020

To Mayor Kennedy and Council,

In support of July 21 Motion 7: **Decriminalizing Poverty and Supporting Community-led Safety Initiatives** and in support of pursuing additional initiatives related to reprioritization/review of public funds related to policing.

On June 6, CUPE 391 released a statement in response to the murder of George Floyd and countless other Black and Indigenous people in North America at the hands of police. In that statement we condemned racism and violence, and committed to work towards change. To begin fulfilling that commitment, CUPE 391 is adding our support to the demand from Black Lives Matter Vancouver that "the City of Vancouver defund the VPD and redirect funds to helpful initiatives." In doing so, we acknowledge that systemic issues are often invisible to those privileged enough not to experience them, and we seek to amplify the labour and momentum of Black Lives Matter and other Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour. We are asking that you bring forward and/or support motions to council that will direct the City of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia to review the percentage of city budget allocated to police funding, and to reprioritize those funds to other, more effective community services.

We are not asking to do away with public safety. We are saying that the lives of our community members are worth considering the propensity of over-policing to cause harm, and worth considering an improved way of addressing public safety while responding to community needs. This is not just a general call for more resources for community services - that is a call that is more difficult than ever in the current economic climate. We are calling instead for acknowledgement of the overfunding and overreach of the police, and for engagement in conversation about where that money can be better spent. We want to see the City and the Province create security and safety through the reallocation of funds to support childcare, community-based social programming, library services, expanded women's shelters, education, food security, housing, harm reduction, and healthcare.

Members of CUPE 391 know that the public library has long been a place of triage in our communities, where people can identify and connect to vital organizations and resources. It is a social place where poverty, the housing crisis, the opioid crisis, mental illness, and transgenerational trauma become more visible. As library workers, we often find ourselves defacto filling in roles from educators and social service providers, to security and caregivers. When tensions arise at the library that require our members to call 911, it is often a result of mental health struggles, trauma, homelessness, addiction, or a combination of these. We have heard the message from BIPOC patrons and their communities, as well as that of other vulnerable community members whom we serve, that their safety is threatened by police presence in response to incidents. Library patrons and library workers are calling for actual structural changes at City and Provincial levels to ensure community needs are met and fostered.

The demand for reprioritization of VPD resources means a lot for library workers and it means a lot coming from library workers. In the words of the legendary activist Angela Davis: “[Defunding is] about shifting public funds to new services and new institutions — mental health counselors, who can respond to people who are in crisis without arms. It’s about shifting funding to education, to housing, to recreation. All of these things help to create security and safety. It’s about learning that safety, safeguarded by violence, is not really safety.” [\[2020-06-12, Democracy Now!\]](#) This demand is about acknowledging that the current system, and the current distribution of public funds, is not working - not for communities and not for the police. It is not helping us become a society in which everyone is healthy and free, nor is it helping the police address their own identified stressors of taking on more and varied responsibilities. The current choice to invest in a punitive model of policing causes disproportionate harm to BIPOC, to people struggling with mental health issues, and to many others. It perpetuates a system steeped in punishment, violence and systemic racism - a system that can often put the appearance of law and order over the value of individual human lives. Too many times in our city, we have witnessed actions of the city and police that appear to prioritize the protection of private property over the lives and community needs of our vulnerable neighbours.

CUPE 391 library workers stand in solidarity with workers and organizations across sectors in the City of Vancouver calling for an evidence-based approach to redistributing funds to appropriate community-led services. We choose to affirm the messages and lives of those who speak to lived experience. We are asking the City of Vancouver and the Province of British Columbia to redistribute funds to reflect a just society and engage in a process of reflection on the complicity and reproduction of oppressive structures within institutions and governments. Research has demonstrated, over and over, that community-based social programs and responses are a far more reliable path to public safety and healthy communities. We have seen the talents and strengths of city and library workers demonstrated in unexpected ways during the current crisis of the pandemic; working with VPD and VFS at the Emergency Operations Centre, for example. There are numerous illustrations over the past few months of the good work that can be done when political will is strong. If there was a time to be assessing governance and funding structures and the impacts of those on vulnerable or marginalized groups, it is now.

Sincerely,
Kari Scott-Whyte
President, CUPE Local 391

On behalf of the CUPE 391 Executive
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