Social Planning Council *of Winnipeg*
est. 1919
432 Ellice Ave. Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 1Y4
Telephone: (204) 943-2561 | Fax: (204) 942-3221
E-mail: info@spcw.mb.ca | Website: www.spcw.mb.ca

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Members of the Executive Policy Committee

I am here today to support the motion to amend the Winnipeg Police Board Bylaw. In particular, the recommendation:

"To allow for an increase in the composition of the Winnipeg Police Board from seven to up to nine members, by increasing the number of members that may be appointed by Council from five to up to seven, and to allow for the Board to nominate two Citizen members."

The Social Planning Council has consulted with other community organizations and they agree that this expansion would allow for better representation from communities currently not represented on the Board, especially the newcomer and Indigenous.

We do ask for the submission to Council, 5(c), be amended to go further and stipulate that of the citizen appointments, there shall be at least one Indigenous and one newcomer representative.

We believe this will go a long way towards helping the City of Winnipeg on its path towards reconciliation, building a just city and to helping the Winnipeg Police Board meet its vision of a "Culture of Safety for All."

Just as the Winnipeg Police Service is moving towards being representative of the population they serve, the Board that governs them should as well. Newcomers and Indigenous citizens are the fastest growing segments of Winnipeg's population. In 2011 these groups represented 22 and 12 percent respectively of Winnipeg's total population. We fully expect the October 2016 census numbers to show an increase given that yearly, on average, 12,000 newcomers settle in Winnipeg while thousands more Indigenous people call Winnipeg home each year. Both groups have perspectives and experiences that must be reflected in the governance structure of our police service.

Indigenous people have higher rates of involvement with every aspect of our justice system. Indigenous people have vastly higher incarceration rates. The 2016 report from the federal Department of Public Safety shows an increase of 16.6% over the past five years and almost 40% since 2006. 2006 is important to note as that is when the former federal government began in earnest to implement the so-called 'tough on crime' agenda that has proven to be failure in the jurisdictions in which it has been tried. Currently Indigenous men represent 25% of all incarcerated men while Indigenous women are 36% of the women. But Indigenous peoples only make up 5% of Canada's total population. These numbers are federal so it is important to note that three times more are in provincial institutions and in Manitoba 73% are Indigenous.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission called for all levels of government to commit to eliminating this inequity. It also called on all governments to work to address Indigenous victims of crime. Indigenous representation on the WPB will provide a direct link to those communities to help realize these calls to action.

Any approach to public safety must address the root causes and social preconditions that lead to involvement in the justice system. New and Indigenous Canadians are both over represented in poverty. Racialized poverty leads to lower employment and incomes. Both groups are more likely to live in inner city neighbourhoods that are more heavily policed so further increasing their chances of coming into contact. Also, many newcomers come to Canada with difficult and sometimes traumatic experiences with the authorities in their countries of birth. The Board would only benefit from having these perspective when making decisions on how best to move towards a safer community for all.

We do want to recognize the work and contributions of the Indigenous Advisory Council and liaison committee. It is important to note though there is no similar mechanism for newcomers, the need to improve relations between the police service and newcomer youth in particular was recognized and a grassroots movement called Umoja, meaning unity, was born. It currently has the active participation of community, the Winnipeg Police Service and RCMP. These initiatives are helpful but not enough. Holding to the adage that not only does justice need to be done, it needs to be seen to be done, it is essential that representation go beyond mere input to decision making authority in the form of an actual vote.

As an example, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg's by-laws stipulate that we have a minimum of three Indigenous members and while not enshrined yet, since our involvement in the creation of Immigration Partnership Winnipeg, it has been our practice to actively seek out newcomer members of which we currently have three. For an organization that purports to be about social justice, the voices of the communities most effected by inequity are invaluable. They allow and even force us to remain informed and relevant to current conditions.

Under the section "Implications of the recommendations", the Board report recognizes that increasing the number of board members will allow them "to address identified gaps in its collective competencies and diversity, and ensure its membership better reflect the communities it serves". We applaud the Board's commitment. However, including our proposed amendment will serve to strengthen and formalize that purpose.

Sincerely,



Kate Kehler,
Executive Director