June 16th, 2021

Executive Policy Committee

Item 12: Winnipeg Police Board Budget Referral – Capital and Operating for Body Worn Cameras and Digital Evidence Management

The Police Accountability Coalition (PAC) is a coalition of over 100 community based organizations committed to seeking meaningful change to address police violence and systemic racism. Our brief, Community Based Organizations Call for Police Accountability and Reallocation of Resources, lays out recommendations for all levels of governance on policing and Justice systems. Our coalition includes Black and Indigenous led organizations as well as allies.

Our brief does include a recommendation to adopt body worn cameras but with the important caveat that **all costs associated with the implementation be found within the existing police budget**. Our reasons are:

- The City of Winnipeg already spends the largest proportion of its budget on policing, more than a full quarter with planned increases until 2024, when compared to other Canadian cities.

- A recent Angus Reid poll found that only 13% of Winnipeggers supported increased spending on policing*.

- Increasing investment in policing has not resulted in a corresponding increase in community safety. Crime rates have risen as the conditions that contribute to crime have worsened while the relationship between the police and members of BIPOC communities have continued to deteriorate.

- While body worn cameras have the potential to provide evidence of negative interactions with members of the Winnipeg Police Service, the research** is mixed on their effectiveness and highlights their potential negative consequences to the very community members they are being implemented to help.

When discussing the pros and cons of body worn cameras, one often hears of their so-called 'civilizing effect'. The police officers who killed George Floyd were wearing body cameras. There are also too many other body worn and dashboard camera videos of police officers using unnecessary force to rely on their preventative effectiveness. When phones with cameras became commonplace and people began filming police encounters, the reaction from the police by and large was to get aggressive, even confiscating phones. We must consider that people with negative histories with and/or perception of police, or are simply in full crisis, may actually escalate once they are aware they are being filmed. Then there are the privacy concerns on the how, when and why the footage would be released. These policies must be developed with full transparency with the protection of the public as the first priority.

We are also concerned that the administrative report submitted in support of body worn cameras, along with a statement made by Chief Smyth at the June 4th meeting of the Winnipeg Police Board, seem to indicate that the cameras will only be 'triggered' when a weapon is drawn. Our brief recommended the adoption, within existing budgets, of body worn cameras as a means of gathering proof beyond the anecdotal that the experiences of BIPOC community members being over-policed as in stopped and questioned for no real reason, whether officially 'carded' or not, are real. Currently, unless an encounter results in further action by the police, there is no record kept. It is challenging to have a productive conversation on policing and the overall effectiveness of initiatives like 'predictive policing' methods if there is no ability to gather the evidence that there is a problem. It must be noted, community members who experience intimidation from a member of the police, are experiencing violence. It just doesn't leave a visible mark.

At the same June 4th police board meeting, Chief Smyth highlighted the low number of biased policing complaints. PAC maintains that the numbers are low because the public has lost faith in that process. PAC notes that in the recent report *The Winnipeg Police Service Mental Health and Workplace Survey* that members themselves are concerned that problematic members are not dealt with quickly or effectively. Body worn cameras could contribute to the discussion with video evidence that is collected and maintained under strict and transparent policies that includes that the cameras must be on whenever a member is interacting with the public.

PAC opposes allocating additional funding for this initiative. As community-based organizations, we are asked to do more with less all of the time. Many community-based organizations saw a reduction in funding as a result of the four-year City budget process. A survey of our sector, could we afford to do one, would likely mirror the one just released on WPS members; mental health concerns, challenges with work/life balance and even unsafe working conditions due to being chronically unreliably underfunded. Front-line community workers are burning out as they struggle to meet soaring community needs that are a direct consequence of the systemic racism and poverty that foster the conditions that lead to crime. In a $304 million, and growing, budget, the funds to improve accountability and rebuild public confidence in what is fundamentally a public service, one that wields the power of life and death, must and should be found. Two potential areas for cost saving are included in our policy brief. Our recommendations include ending the school resource officer program and reversing the trend toward the increasing

militarization of the police. This would include the capital investment and operating costs associated with the police helicopter.

* **Link to Angus Reid Poll**

https://angusreid.org/rcmp-systemic-racism-indigenous/

Winnipeg and Toronto residents expressed the lowest levels of support for increased funding for policing when compared to other Canada cities. Only 13% of Winnipeg residents supported increased funding for the police compared to the national average of 19%. The majority (63%) of Canadians indicated that they would prefer investment in social welfare strategies rather than increasing the presence of police in high crime areas.

****Summaries of research on body-worn cameras**

1. *Evaluating the impact of police officer body-worn cameras (BWCs) on response-to-resistance and serious external complaints: Evidence from the Orlando police department (OPD) experience utilizing a randomized controlled experiment.*

https://media.fox13news.com/media.fox13news.com/document_dev/2016/03/15/JCJ2015paper_1009260_ver1.0.pdf

This study points towards the effectiveness of body-worn cameras (BWCs) for improving relations between the community and police. It observed that significantly fewer officers who wore body cameras were involved in response-to-resistance incidents, had less external complaints overall, and fewer were subjects of external complaints compared to officers not wearing a body camera. The study acknowledges the upfront costs are significant but seemed to stress their value.

2. *A randomized control trial evaluating the effects of police body-worn cameras*

https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/116/21/10329.full.pdf

At the time it was published, this study was the largest randomized evaluation of BWCs conducted to date. The study found that body cameras had no effect on officer behavior. One theory was that the officers become desensitized to the cameras over time. Another theory was that the effect of body cameras may be masked by widespread use of other recording devices (CCTV, personal cell phones) in police interactions. The researchers concluded that their experiment suggests that we should recalibrate our expectations of body cameras as a solution to many policing difficulties. The researchers noted that body-worn cameras may be helpful in specific policing scenarios, but cannot be expected to produce large-scale improvements in policing.

3. *Police Officer Body-Worn Cameras: Assessing the Evidence*

https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/lbrr/archives/cnmcs-plcng/cn31934-eng.pdf

This paper draws from a variety of sources to conclude that there is little evidence regarding most of the perceived benefits and drawbacks of body cameras, although they have some utility in terms of a potential civilizing effect and evidentiary benefits.

4. *Police body cameras in Canada: How common are they and do they reduce excessive force?*

   https://globalnews.ca/news/7043597/police-use-body-cameras-canada/

   This recent news article highlights the current status of body cameras in Canada, with interviews from researchers who debate the efficacy of cameras.

5. *Body Cameras May Not Be the Easy Answer Everyone Was Looking For*

   https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2020/01/14/body-cameras-may-not-be-the-easy-answer-everyone-was-looking-for

   This article highlights studies which call into question the usefulness of body cameras.

6. *Research on body-worn cameras: What we know, what we need to know*

   https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1745-9133.12412

   This narrative review of research concludes that there is growing support for body cameras, they have not had statistically significant or consistent effects on officer and citizen behavior.

7. *The Effects of Body-Worn Cameras on Police Activity and Police-Citizen Encounters: A Randomized Controlled Trial*

   https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7632&context=jclc

   This research found several studies find that body cameras reduce complaints against police officers and officer use of force reports, while other studies find no statistically significant reductions in complaints against officers wearing body cameras. They also found concerning increase in assaults on officers that wear body cameras. They also found growing evidence that suggests body cameras may result in increased enforcement activity by police officers.