

**From:** Ralph Kaisers

**Sent:** July 23, 2020 5:55 PM

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**Cc:** 'PALMER, Adam'; 'CHOW, Howard (VPD)'

**Subject:** 2020-07-23 Council Member Motion Decriminalizing Poverty and Supporting Community Led Safety Initiative

Good evening Mayor Stewart and City Council,

Today, I spoke to City Council on this motion, and do have a few other points that need to be added to my comments, and will share these in point form to keep it short.

I am a proud member of the VPD who has served this City for 28 years, was born and raised in Vancouver, and am also a homeowner in Vancouver.

As a VPD member I have worked in patrol for some 10 years, 5 of which were in the DTES. I have also worked as a detective, and as a sergeant, in our major crime section where I investigated, or lead teams that investigated, violent offences that occurred in the DTES.

I have been the Vancouver Police Union President for just over a year, and have been a part of the board for some 8 other years holding various roles. The Vancouver Police Union currently has 1453 members.

The Vancouver Police Union and its members do not support this motion.

- With an already modest annual budget, the VPD has undergone two separate, large-scale independent organizational reviews in the past 15 years – one a recent as 2017. The reviews recommended efficiency through reallocation of existing resources, utilizing civilian professionals, and leveraging technology and analytics. These reviews identified that virtually all of the VPD's budget is non-discretionary after implementing all possible internal efficiency changes.
- The VPD has only now, in 2020, returned to 2009 staffing levels. In contrast, during the same period, Vancouver's population has increased by 11%, the region's population has risen by 17%, and calls for service requiring VPD attendance have grown by 14%.

- It would be detrimental to the overall safety in the city to lose members to cutbacks. It is a huge risk right now to lay people off with the creation of the Surrey Police Department in the works. It would be impossible to get these members back. Further, recruiting, screening, training and mentoring new officers requires significant lead time.
- A \$6M budget cut would require us to reduce sworn officer staffing substantially – to a point that we would have fewer officers working now than we did in 2009. (\$6M equals approximately 60 members)
- Rather than addressing this service gap and public safety issue, the gap widens as calls continue to rise, as drive by resident and business populations, while the number of officers fails to grow from 2009 levels.
- We see measurable negative results from doing more with less:
  - Rising response times to our highest priority calls for service (e.g. in progress violent crimes including stabbings, robberies and sexual assaults) – our response time to these highest priority calls for service is 26% slower than peer Canadian police agencies;
  - Increased officer burnout and fatigue (the VPU survey which found exhaustion rates at 44%)

Specifically looking at the motion and the recommendations:

In terms of mental health calls:

- We've been calling since 2007 (via the *Lost in Transition* report) for more work by our partners to prevent the criminalization of mentally ill persons;
- The number of mental health apprehensions (s. 28) officers make due to encountering someone who is a danger to themselves or others has remained relatively stable over the last decade – averaging between 2500 and 3000 apprehensions per year;
- The significant change is the number of Form 4 and Form 21 apprehensions, where warrants of apprehension are issued by mental health professionals who are unable to go and locate persons under their care living in the community
- These Form apprehensions were essentially zero a decade ago but now average nearly 2000 such apprehensions per year;
- This workload is being downloaded on us from the very bodies our critics say we need to partner with or let attend calls instead – this reality shows that such calls are not feasible given their operational realities;
- We've been saying for years that officers should not have to do this work, in particular the transport of mentally ill persons (as it is a medical issue) and, especially, guard apprehended persons at hospital (as we have delivered the person to a medical facility and are seeking to limit our involvement in a health matter);

- However, those looking to limit such calls, and reallocate resources, should base their expectations on data – if the 5000 apprehensions (all of the s. 28s and the Form apprehensions) we do a year were cut in half, it is estimated that such a substantial reduction would be the equivalent of 4 to 5 positons (on the order of \$0.5M) – thus, there are not millions of dollars in savings expected.

In terms of drug use calls:

- We ultimately do not do any street level enforcement on any person who is using as we have seen drug use as a medical issue for users, and have only targeted those that are supplying drugs to the users. A concern by all has been the opioid crisis and the effects these drugs have had on our citizens, and particularly those that live the DTES. With the onset of the Public Health Emergency related to the opioids VPD members were quickly issued Naloxone kits as we are quite often among the first people to encounter users that are overdosing.
- We have saved 51 lives using our naloxone kits.

In terms of sex work calls:

- We have not in years done any targeted enforcement of anyone that is involved in the sex trade, aside from those that are exploiting those that are in the industry against their own free will.
- We specifically focus on suspects who try to exploit children, and those involved in child pornography.
- This is not something we can stop enforcing!
- We offer support to those that come to us for assistance in trying to get out of the industry.

In terms of homelessness:

- The VPD has had one member dedicated as a homeless liaison officer. Their role has primarily been a conduit for the homeless and BC housing to get these people into housing;
- They work at the street level and are involved in outreach work which includes getting the homeless sleeping bags, clean dry socks, and the many other offerings that the community gives to the VPD to distribute among the homeless;
- In 2019, the homeless count was 2223 people and 614 of those people were living on the street.

In terms of staff seeking the input of community groups:

- I would agree with this strategy but it cannot be limited to the group that is listed in this motion.
- This is a very limited number of community groups and are all supportive of defunding the police because they are in the hopes of gaining financial support from the City, at the cost of stripping the Vancouver Police of these funds.

- There is over a million dollars a day that gets pumped into the DTES every day and these groups benefit from this money being sent there. Do they all have a president? Chairman? Executive director? Office staff? Office space?
- If we are looking to better fund these issues in the DTES should we not look at some form of an efficiency review of how this money is being divided in the DTES? A conservative one million dollars a day divided among the 2223 homeless people equates to \$449 a day per person. Where is all this money going?
- In this last year's budget proposal that was forwarded to City Council by the VPB I remind you that there were some 100+ legitimate community groups that wrote to the board and council in support of the VPD and their budgetary requirements.
- Policy decisions should not be made on the basis of 399 people who have been solicited by a city councilor(s) to speak for a city of some 700,000 citizens.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that over many years we have been a part of many efficiency reviews and have modified the way we do business. I can't stress enough that a quick "knee jerk reaction" and adoption of a solution from one place or another circumvents the importance of proper evaluation. We have been party to a number of pilot projects that have demonstrated a more efficient way of doing policing here in Vancouver and the two most recent have been the Assertive Outreach Team and Assertive Community Treatment Team . In these two programs we have partnered up with some 40 health care professionals to assist those with the most complex mental health issues. These two units have reduced the number of police contacts and emergency room visits for most of these clients. They are great programs, were run as pilot projects, and their positive effects could be measured and assessed

We have heard a lot about defunding the police but there have been no actual solutions proposed or suggestions that have been proven to work. This needs to be evidence based with measureable matrix's attached to assess its true feasibility before you compromise the safety of the Citizens in Vancouver. Now is not the time to further limit the capacity of the Vancouver Police to connect with our communities and to provide the services to those who are most in need of assistance and protection.

Vancouver Police members are essential to fill in the public safety gap and keep Vancouver a safe place to work, live, and play. This motion will create more of a safety gap.

Please do not hesitate in contacting me if you have any questions or concerns,

Regards,

*Ralph Kaisers, President  
Vancouver Police Union  
604-xxx-xxxx*

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