



Showing Up for Racial Justice - Worcester

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Policing is not a thin blue line protecting us. Policing is not a solution to social problems. Policing is a social contract over who has the right to use force for control, and it must be critically examined now. This is as true for the Worcester Police as any other department. They occupy our streets, our schools, our social media, and this has taken the greatest toll on the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities in our city. The hundreds of millions of dollars spent on supporting and defending Worcester police is money not spent on the schools, housing, parks, or public health that Worcester needs. Worcester's BIPOC community has demanded to be heard and made clear calls for what is needed going forward. They have been echoed in the massive protests, phone calls, letters and public comments all affirming that we do not want a single penny more spent on policing.

Public officials cannot assert that Black Lives Matter and then turn to defend a police force whose existence is a persistent assault on the livelihoods and lives of Black People. The police do not need to be defended. They are already protected by millions of dollars in settlements to avoid trials, by the city keeping records from the media, and by a toothless Human Rights Commission. Nearly every WPD police officer earns two to five times the median household income in Worcester. The police are fine, safe and well compensated, unlike the many communities in Worcester who could stand to benefit from the over \$52 million dollars allocated to the WPD annual budget. Police fears and political fear of the police can no longer be used to justify bad policy and the toxic cultures that harm BIPOC communities.

At the recent rally outside of City Hall to demand the city reduce the police budget, two young white women held up a sign with the popular slogan "Budgets Are a Moral Issue." Why a moral issue? Because where you put your money shows your values. When our budget says police will receive a third of our city's budget, when the waitlist for affordable housing is years long, that is a moral issue. When our budget spends more on prisons, jails, and juvenile detention than employment programs or youth jobs, that is a moral issue. When our budget allocates over 60 times the amount on policing as it does on public health, even in the time of a worldwide pandemic, that is a moral issue. When our police budget grows yet again to cover an estimated \$4.6 million in overtime pay, when Worcester has more students without roofs over their heads than any other city in the state, that is a moral issue. It is a moral failing.

This statement comes from the Worcester chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Worcester. Our mission is to mobilize white people to act as allies and accomplices in multiracial, BIPOC led movements for racial justice within the City of Worcester and surrounding Central Massachusetts towns. We hear Black activists and leaders in Worcester (and the Commonwealth, and across the country) clearly calling for the funding and the resources to make their communities safe and to make them safer by defunding policing. What we are hearing in response from white elected officials, the white police chief, and the anonymous figures promoting a "WOO BLUE Rally" today, is that they cannot imagine a society where policing is not the government's answer to social problems.

We all want safe communities. We want the public protected from harm. We know that, despite many good people's best intentions, policing does not and will not provide those things. We hear our Black, Brown and Indigenous neighbors' demands for something better and we call on everyone to embrace this moment and make it happen.