



YouthCO HIV & Hep C Society

Unceded xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh and Tsleil-Waututh Territories
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June 24, 2020

To the City of Burnaby elected officials:

We are writing today on behalf of YouthCO HIV & Hep C Society to:

- draw your attention to the urgent need to address the calls to support Black lives and futures,
- express our concern about the role of police within our communities, and
- ask for your commitment and action to address these urgent concerns.

YouthCO is a youth-led organization that works to reduce the impacts of HIV and Hep C stigma on youth in British Columbia. We understand HIV and Hep C stigma to include racism, colonization, and many other forms of oppression. Our peer-led team offers programming within and beyond the City of Burnaby, including in Surrey, the Fraser Valley, and Vancouver. Our letter today is based on the need for changes to the ways police are mobilized and resourced within the community, and draws from the work of Black Lives Matter Vancouver. Their full statement, directed to the City of Vancouver, is available [online here](#). **We ask that you, as an elected official, review [the full statement online here](#), and use this to consider actions you can take to support Black lives in Burnaby, and reduce ongoing police violence that takes place within our communities.**

We ask that you direct your attention to the following asks:

- redirecting financial resources that are currently allocated to the Burnaby RCMP detachment to community-driven social supports and responses to violence
- address ongoing inequities within the City of Burnaby related to housing, access to public spaces, and services such as childcare
- commit to the goal of eventually abolishing police and prisons, created for colonial purposes, that reinforce inequities, oppress marginalized communities, and serve the wealthiest among us
- condemn anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence and harm enacted by the RCMP

Given the current and historical experiences of police violence, YouthCO is concerned about size of the City of Burnaby 2020 Budget allocated to the RCMP, and the proportion of spending on RCMP services as compared to alternatives. **We need immediate action to reduce the realities of police violence in our communities.** We call upon our elected officials to **start divesting from the inherently violent institution that is the RCMP.**

At this time, we also act that the City of Burnaby work with the RCMP to limit firearms being carried and used by officers, and, ensure transparent and thorough data is publicly available about arrest and police interactions.

YouthCO office is on the unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and our work takes place on the lands of Indigenous people across what is colonially called British Columbia.

In our experience, RCMP presence does not keep our communities safe. It directly threatens the lives of youth who experience oppression and exclusion, including Black youth, Indigenous youth, youth of colour, transgender, Two-Spirit, non-binary youth, queer youth, sex workers, people with disabilities, people who rely on public spaces, and people who are living with HIV.

The City of Burnaby has as safe communities as a priority. Instead of investing in RCMP, our city must prioritize alternatives like education, increased mental health services, housing initiatives, income security, harm reduction services, accessible arts, and cultural programs, conflict resolution services, and community-based support systems.

What steps will you take to shift resources away from the RCMP, and into the alternatives that will keep our communities safe, and Black people alive? We urge you to take action today in order to support Black lives. Black Lives Matter has provided us all with a way forward to address anti-Black racism, having invested time, energy, and labour in preparing a list of ways forward in this time of grief in the wake of recent deaths and harm as a result of police and RCMP involvement.

We look forward to your response as to how you will be protecting Black lives, supporting Black leadership, and strengthening Black community through City initiatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Chown', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sarah Chown, Executive Director
YouthCO HIV & Hep C Society