

My name is Joanna Silver and I am testifying on behalf of the Silver Spring Justice Coalition and Takoma Park Mobilization. Both of these groups are part of the Montgomery County Defund and Invest in Communities Coalition. I also served on the County Executive's Taskforce on Reimagining Public Safety.

Both the Defund & Invest Coalition AND the Reimagining Public Safety Taskforce call for a harm reduction approach to public safety and both recognize that the primary way to reduce harm is to reduce unnecessary interactions between police and the public. We have such painful examples, on video, of the harms caused by our police. We saw it again this morning in Takoma Park: abuse, violence, and death resulting when armed law enforcement officers confront members of our community.

This Council cannot delude itself into thinking that we can train our way out of this and we absolutely cannot throw more money at it. Just yesterday Chief Jones had the gall to ask for more money because his Internal Affairs officers cannot handle five or six cases a year. This is a division that received a complaint about the abuse of a child by police officers and waited 8 months to even interview the officers? That Division does not deserve a dime more of our money. Nor should this Council give our police department more money to make sure we know what they are doing through robust and transparent data collection.

The Taskforce report contains many recommendations that, if implemented, would reduce the need for officers and support a decreased police budget: reducing traffic enforcement has been mentioned by many, as has actually ending the SRO program; but there are also measures such as prohibiting pretextual stops; requiring the issuance of citations instead of arrests in citable cases; stop issuing citations period for status offenses and conduct that is merely the product of mental illness or homelessness; and end the practice of police officers acting as the agents of private property owners.

This Council must pass a budget that reduces the harms caused by police by reducing the size of our police force while ensuring public safety by investing in proactive, positive measures such as affordable housing, good-paying jobs; child care; mental health services; restorative justice; and educational supports.

Thank you.