



East Coast Prison Justice Society
6061 University Avenue
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February 17, 2021

HRM Budget Committee
Halifax City Hall
1841 Argyle Street
Halifax, NS B3J 3A5

RE: Proposed Budget for Halifax Regional Police, Fiscal 2021/2022

Good morning,

My name is Tari Ajadi, and I am a board member of the East Coast Prison Justice Society as well as a member of the Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group. Thanks to the budget committee for providing the opportunity today to discuss the Halifax Regional Police projected budget for 2021-2022.

I'd like to focus specifically on one aspect of the proposed budgetary increase of 3.1% for the Regional Police, with the understanding that your mandate is either to approve or reject the proposed budget. It is clear to me that the Regional Police's \$85,000 request for a one-year term position to write a report on body-worn cameras is an unwise investment that ought to require broader scrutiny from Halifax Council as well as the Board of Police Commissioners. This scrutiny should include the rejection of the budget as presented, to be returned back to the Board of Police Commissioners. There are three reasons why this budgetary increase ought to be rejected.

Firstly, any increase to the police budget during a period where we currently have two parallel processes run by Regional Council and by the Board of Police Commissioners looking at models to defund the police runs the risk of undermining public confidence in those processes. As community advocates looking to foster robust and meaningful public engagement around these issues, particularly within marginalized communities in this municipality, a unilateral increase flies in the face of Council's stated goals of meaningfully reflecting the public mood on this issue.

Secondly, Halifax Regional Police cannot be trusted to provide accurate and extensive research around a budgetary request that we already know they seek. The research process is already biased; we know what the conclusions will be. The Halifax Regional Police has a track record of misleading Council and misleading the Board of Police Commissioners about important topics. A report tabled just last week by the Auditor General indicates that the Regional Police's claims of improving IT security were inaccurate, and the progress reports they provided to the Board of Police Commissioners were untrue. Moreover, the supplementary report that Halifax Regional Police submitted to the Board on 18th January is filled with similar misstatements, half-truths and obfuscations. The report failed, for example, to mention any of the null or negative reports and experiences of body-worn cameras in pilot projects in Edmonton, Montreal, and with the RCMP. The report also misrepresented the findings of pilot projects that they cited as positive. The findings of Durham Regional Police Service's experience with body-worn cams were, in fact, that and I quote: "there are limited objective measurable data to suggest there are multiple substantive benefits to implement a BWC program." These reports are publicly available and easily accessible. I can only suspect that the choice not to include these findings in said supplementary report was a conscious one. An investment in a term position to produce biased outcomes like this does not strike me as acceptable or meaningful oversight.

Finally, and most importantly, actual consultations with experts on body-worn cameras indicate that this investment is *at best* unlikely to produce discernable objective outcomes in either a positive or a negative way. At worst, the push for body cameras is being cultivated by Axon Enterprise, which is rapidly creating a monopoly on the technology, as well as the cloud storage solutions used to save footage, across Canada. This technology has prompted police forces in the US to hire extra people to manage the footage and the tech after implementing it because it proved to be unmanageable, while others have gotten rid of them entirely because they proved to be unworkable. The Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group has consulted extensively with Dr. Christopher Schneider of Brandon University and Erick Laming of University of Toronto, two leading experts nationwide on the rollout and oversight of this tech. Both have published extensively on this subject, and have a wealth of peer-reviewed research that shows that there is a far greater need for scrutiny of body-worn cams.

That scrutiny cannot and will not be found within the Halifax Regional Police, given their track record and given their clear and pressing preference to implement this technology. I strongly suggest that Halifax Regional Council rejects this budgetary request. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Tari Ajadi

Appendix A: Press release issued by Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group on December 15, 2020

December 15, 2020

For immediate release: Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group shows that body-worn cameras will not increase police accountability

We are deeply concerned by some of the claims that representatives of Halifax Regional Police, including Chief Dan Kinsella, made yesterday in [their presentation](#) to the Board of Police Commissioners regarding the implementation of body-worn cameras (BWCs) across the police force. The Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group (NS PPWG) would like to take this opportunity to clarify the record on BWCs.

To be clear:

Spending \$3.7 million on this technology, particularly at a time when both the [Police Board](#) and the [HRM](#) are actively exploring alternatives to policing in Halifax, is wrong.

The NS PPWG's opinion is consistent: there is little evidence to suggest that BWCs improve police accountability or reduce officers' use of force ([Lum et al., 2019](#); [Yokum et al., 2017](#)). Research suggests that adoption of the cameras is also premature and that many police agencies might not actually need body cameras ([Laming, 2019](#)). Footage of police abuse captured by citizens (such as the murders of George Floyd and Eric Garner or videos of undercover police inciting violence at the 2007 Montebello summit protests in Quebec) have been more effective than video captured on BWCs in holding police forces to account ([Schneider, 2018](#)). In the case of George Floyd, the officers who killed him were wearing BWCs. This technology did not prevent Derek Chauvin from kneeling on his neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds. Floyd's death was brought to the attention of the public because of cell phone video not body-worn camera footage.

[We also have significant concerns](#) about the role of Axon Enterprise, who appear to hold a monopoly on this technology in Canada, in pushing for a full rollout of the BWC program in Halifax Regional Municipality, instead of a pilot program. Research by [Dr. Christopher Schneider](#) (Brandon University) and [Erick Laming](#) (Centre of Criminology and Sociolegal Studies, University of Toronto), two leading experts in Canada who have together published numerous academic studies and opinion essays that show the cameras are not the panacea that the public expects. Some of their forthcoming research about BWCs indicates that Axon has made unsubstantiated, market-based claims about the efficacy of BWCs.

Finally, without clear policies on when officers can turn cameras on or off, and clear policies on citizen access to BWC video, the alleged increase in officer transparency is unlikely to occur.

To dig deeper into the lack of evidence in support of BWCs, we spoke with Dr. Christopher Schneider and Erick Laming about some of the claims made by Halifax Regional Police.

Q&A:

On Chief Kinsella's claim that full deployment of BWCs without a pilot project are "best practices"

Laming: "This is completely untrue. As a matter of fact, nearly all police services who have piloted BWCs (including all medium to large agencies) have equipped only a few officers with the devices. For example, both Fredericton Police Force and Medicine Hat Police Service equipped six officers each with cameras while piloting the technology. Likewise, pilot programs with the RCMP, Toronto, Montreal, Durham Region, Edmonton, Calgary, and Thunder Bay only rolled out [a] few cameras to a limited number of officers in each jurisdiction (e.g., less than 100 officers in each service)."

Schneider: "This statement is false. In many circumstances only select patrol officers were outfitted with cameras in order to test the efficacy of body cameras against those not wearing cameras. The research is inconclusive. In some circumstances, officer use of force goes down as do citizen complaints and in other situations officer force increases. Several studies, including one in Edmonton, actually found no differences between officers wearing body-worn cameras and those not wearing the devices."

On Chief Kinsella's claim that BWCs align with calls to defund the police

Laming [when asked if this was accurate]: "No. The adoption of body-worn cameras will only increase police budgets."

Schneider: "Police body-worn cameras are not at all in line with calls to defund the police. Quite the opposite, in fact. The costs associated with police use of body-worn cameras (much of which is associated with the storage of data and sometimes the hiring of additional personnel) in all circumstances). Halifax police have indicated that their proposed adoption of the cameras will result in four additional positions. Where body cameras have been adopted police budgets have increased."

On the relationship between the claims of BWC efficacy and Axon Enterprise Inc.

Laming: "Axon is one of the leading BWC manufacturers in the world. They have a significant monopoly in this market. They also manufacture Tasers (conducted energy weapon) and have a complete monopoly in the Canadian context. The company has expanded and now sells a variety of technological tools for law enforcement and other industries (e.g., paramedic, fire, construction, business, etc.). Axon plays a significant role in the processes of any police service looking to adopt BWC technology. They fund and sponsor numerous policing conferences and organizations and are actively engaged in decision-making when it comes to police technology adoption. They have a very large presence on social media, particularly on Twitter, where they explicitly comment on and support police practices across Canada. They have historically made many public claims about the efficacy of BWC technology without evidence to support those claims. Axon also employs former police officers who use their connections and networks to sell these products."

Schneider: "Axon is the worldwide purveyor of body-worn cameras and the company has near total control over the body-worn camera market. Think of it like this: Facebook is to social

media as, say, Axon is to body cameras. In a forthcoming research paper, we examined public claims made by Axon over a six-year period and discovered that Axon's claims regarding the efficacy of their products were mostly predicated on market assumptions rather than scientifically or legally grounded. [...] Axon has made public claims in support of their body-worn camera products[,] sometimes absent any empirical evidence, [and] often such claims were supported by beliefs and assumptions about their products. Some of Axon's claims about the efficacy of body cameras were even made in advance of any peer reviewed studies. In other circumstances, Axon has made claims contrary to evidence.

Axon plays a significant role decision-making with police leaders concerning the adoption of body-worn cameras. There are some serious issues with conflict-of-interest concerns but also with whether or not a single company should exert this much control over body-worn cameras.

The public would likely be suspect if, say, Facebook funded studies that discovered that Facebook is good for you and that you should spend more time on Facebook. The public should similarly be suspect of Axon's role and relationships with police concerning their body-worn camera services and products."

On concerns about officers having discretion to turn BWCs on and off

Laming: "Evidence varies on best practices concerning camera activation. Almost all policies give officers discretion in turning cameras on and off. However, most guidelines inform officers that they should activate the camera when they are dispatched to a call and deactivate at the conclusion of the call. It is unrealistic to expect officers to be recording for the entirety of their shift and several police policies dictate that officers must not record certain interactions (e.g., investigative discussions between police personnel, situations that could reveal investigative techniques, administrative tasks, etc.). This area will continue to be debatable, but the evidence available suggests that having a restrictive policy on when officers must activate their cameras results in higher compliance in recording than a policy that is less restrictive on activation. These policies will vary on location and depend on several jurisdictional factors."

Schneider: "Very little is known about this critical issue. Currently, the RCMP, Toronto Police Service, and other law enforcement can turn the cameras on and off. There are a few concerns here. First and foremost, police discretion to switch the camera on or off invalidates any real or creditable discussions of accountability. Second, the highest levels of discretion are exhibited by patrol officers who wear body cameras. These same officers are often the least experienced and least trained yet exhibit the highest levels of discretion."

On whether it is wise for BWCs to be adopted in Halifax without a pilot project

Laming: "No. There should be a period of experimentation, analysis of results, and discussion with community members before any decision is made on a full rollout. If the city of Halifax as well as the police service is serious about building trust with the community, then a pilot program examining the efficacy of BWCs on several factors is a much better investment than complete adoption. At the moment, investing in the community is more worthwhile than investing in a tool that could potentially be used against the community."

Schneider: "Body-worn cameras are not the panacea the public expects. Therefore, further

investment in body-worn cameras is an incredibly poor use of taxpayer money. First, the research literature remains inconclusive concerning the efficacy of the devices. Second, there is zero evidence to suggest that use of body-worn cameras will lead to police transparency or accountability. The \$3.7 million dollars would be better spent on community programs, which would actually be in line with defunding the police.”

Appendix B: Correspondence between NSPPWG, Erick Laming and Christopher Schneider concerning HRP’s Supplementary Report on Body Worn Cameras

“1) Much of the "evidence" based work that is cited is older. It didn't provide several important recent scholarly works that would be useful for a more balanced perspective.

2) The Canadian BWC materials are at best a thin slice of the broader Canadian experience. The BWC projects in Toronto and Durham are not exceptional or even particularly good examples. The findings from Toronto were underwhelming and there is a lack of true experimental design for Toronto and Durham. Also, Toronto shelved BWC adoption for four years after its pilot and only expedited adoption because of the outcry to hold police accountable during the summer of 2020. BWCs were expedited in response to public pressure regarding police accountability concerns in the summer of 2020.

3) Failed to mention the null/negative findings from Edmonton, Montreal, the and RCMP.

4) Misleading reference when saying, "For example, the two most comprehensive studies on BWV implementation in Canada, conducted in Toronto and Durham Region, both included public attitude surveys that demonstrated broad community support for BWV technology" (p.6). Both Edmonton and Montreal were just, if not more comprehensive with their BWC pilots and were left out entirely of the report. This is suspect.

5) Continuously refers to Durham's project and the several benefits gleaned from the pilot, but fails to acknowledge the conclusion from Durham: "Based on this evaluation, the Durham Regional Police Service concludes that there are limited objective measurable data to suggest there are multiple substantive benefits to implement a BWC program. In addition, there is no capacity within the current DRPS budget to support and sustain the fiscal requirements of a BWC program." This is a crucial point for the Board of Commissioners in Halifax to be aware of but is [un]intentionally left out by Halifax police.

6) Generally, the document is not convincingly presented in favour of BWC adoption. If anything, the document raises more concerns and questions about the viability of BWC deployment.

7) On p. 97 of the Report to the Police Services Board (see footnote #3 on p. 6 of the document that you sent to us) the following is noted:

The DRPS collaboration with Dr. Saulnier was formalized through a Research Agreement between DRPS and Lakehead University. Dr. Saulnier accepted the role of

BWC Researcher as a non-remunerative, academic affiliate to provide both primary and secondary support for research and education with the DRPS BWC Project. The Research Agreement enshrined Dr. Saulnier's independence as a researcher...

The fact that Dr. Saulnier is seen lending her status and credentials as a university researcher to promote products for Axon invalidates any status as an "independent researcher." She can be seen here <https://vimeo.com/333138820> (beginning at the 1:34 mark) in this Axon promotional video clip in which she very publicly makes claims about her research alongside Axon representatives and in advance of the publication or peer review of her findings. This is problematic to say the least and raises questions about the nature of her relationship with Axon and their research agreement, e.g., if or how she might benefit from Halifax adoption of BWCs in terms of access to increased research opportunities with Halifax police, etc.. She has essentially been vetted by Axon because she says the right things about their products - as evidenced in the video which is essentially a commercial. So Dr. Saulnier could likely have continued access to research where Axon might otherwise deny scholars who may be more critical of their products - and critical inquiry is absolutely fundamental for the public in this regard. Further, if these data she is discussing come from the RIDE program (which appears likely) RIDE is not a good measurement or predictor for public perceptions of BWCs."