

Hello. My name is Wesley Epplin and I serve as the Director of Health Equity at Health & Medicine Policy Research Group, a 36-year old policy think tank founded by Dr. Quentin Young focused on improving people's health through advancing health equity. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My testimony today focuses on one message pertaining to advancing social justice in Chicago.

That message is: **Chicago does not need more police. Instead, we must invest in our communities' human needs and human rights.**

In August of 2016, Mayor Emanuel announced layoff of 1,000 teachers and other staff at Chicago Public Schools. The very next month, September, Rahm Emanuel announced the plan to hire 1,000 new positions in the Chicago Police Department. Mayor Emanuel cut staffing for things that uplift people – teachers and social support staff in our schools – and then announced the addition of more police. Why?

The root causes of violence are many—poverty, community disinvestment, marginalization, and violence itself has been shown to beget more violence. Do any of you think that police are the solution to the root causes of violence? Are more police officers needed?

Chicago has among the highest ratios of police per capita in the United States. Chicago spends 40% of its corporate fund – roughly \$1.4 billion per year – on police. Ask yourself, do you really believe that this is working to prevent violence? No, it is not.

No, on the contrary, the US Department of Justice report in January of this year reported in graphic detail the racism and violence of the Chicago Police Department—and the impunity and lack of accountability with which it happens. The City of Chicago and the CPD has not fixed these problems. Instead, they're seeking to hire more police. Even Healthy Chicago 2.0, the Chicago Department of Public Health's plan for community health improvement, notes that disproportionate minority contact with police is a problem that exacerbates health inequity in Chicago—and a priority for advancing health equity in Chicago.

Oppressive, disproportionate policing targets communities of color, people living in poverty, religious minorities, LGBTQ people, immigrants, and other marginalized groups – adding yet another layer of violence, oppression, and further marginalization in our society.

Community groups have been pointing out the injustice of this racism, abuse, oppression, and violence for decades. I guarantee you, every one of you has constituents being harmed by the over-investment in and impunity for policing, which comes at the cost of other investments that could actually help reduce violence and many other public health problems. All of us should be disgusted and motivated to end this rampant injustice in Chicago.

Does investing money in an oppressive system of policing make us safer? No, no it does not. Does the violence and oppression of policing lead to further violence? Yes, yes it does.

So, why, at a moment when Chicago needs to be doing its own deep reforms of the CPD is the City hiring more police? Every few months, we hear of another payout to a victim of the CPD's abuse—often the shooting down or beating of one of our neighbors. This amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars over the last decade—and the lives of the individuals and families never being the same.

And yet, our City is hiring more cops. That isn't a progressive response to the problem of community violence. Community disinvestment and marginalization create conditions of inequity that lead to violence. Inequitable conditions and forces of oppression are root causes of violence. Focus on achieving fundamental fairness.

To conclude: No more funding for police. We demand accountability for the police. Do stop throwing ever more funding into policing, which harms our neighbors and communities. Instead, invest our tax dollars into advancing

health equity. Invest in healthcare, public health, education, equitable development without displacement, workforce and employment efforts, and affordable housing. Invest in people's human needs and human rights. **Below is a letter that my colleague Tiffany N. Ford and I had published in the Chicago Tribune on this topic on 10/6/17:**

[Letter: Does Chicago really need more police officers?](#)

As Chicago grapples with its \$259 million budget shortfall, we must ask: How did we get here? Adding 1,000 police officers and paying for Chicago Public Schools security officers contributes a great deal to this budget gap and the City Council is considering ways to close it. Our suggestion is simple: Stop pouring tax dollars into policing. The city's over-reliance on policing is not only breaking the bank, but also deepening the inequities that exist across racial, gender and class lines.

Chicagoans are so accustomed to politicians responding to crime with promises to hire more police, they may not realize that Chicago already has among the highest ratios of police per capita in the nation. Given research demonstrating that more police do not necessarily mean less crime, and given Chicago's own experience with increasing police funding but not proportionately decreasing crime, it is clear that our approach is not working. Why are we continuing to throw money at an ineffective response to violence?

Failure to address the root causes of violence and crime — which include disinvestment and poverty — and instead responding to these issues by allocating additional funding toward police only deepens policing inequities. In January 2017 the U.S. Department of Justice published its investigation of the [Chicago Police Department](#), revealing a pattern of racial inequities in policing and excessive use of force. A 2016 Better Government Association analysis found that Chicago paid \$642 million in police misconduct payouts over 12 years. Again, we ask, why would Chicago reinforce structural inequities by putting more money into a system rife with abuse that is demonstrably ineffective for the problem we are seeking to address?

Chicago's current budgeting decisions sap the strengths and resources of large swaths of the city and punish people for being victims of structural violence. This cycle must end.

Are we serious about reducing violence and crime? We need an equitable education system, social services throughout the city, and affordable housing for all. We need economic opportunity in every neighborhood and a reliable public transportation system that works for all Chicagoans. What we do not need is more money for police.

— *Tiffany Ford, policy analyst; and Wesley Epplin, director of health equity, Health & Medicine Policy Research Group, Chicago*