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Topic: Motion re: Board of Police Commissioners

I am appearing here today to express my support for the City Councillors' proposal to amend the Board of Police Commissioners and also to raise my concern about police accountability in the city.

I am a long-time community advocate and community mental health nurse, working with people in our inner-city for more than 40 years. From my experiences in this work, I have come to know that we must be open to hearing criticism if we are going to do our jobs well in meeting the needs of the citizens of our city. I have had to work at making myself open to hearing criticism because it is the way that I learn and make positive changes in my work. We need to always be open to criticism. When complaints and criticism cease, we have a serious problem in our community for citizens and police. A truly accountable police force will be one that welcomes criticism, and that has rarely been the history of this police force.

I admit that I have been a vocal critic of police when needed because I work in the inner-city community and listen when people raise concerns. Many are concerns that can be challenging to hear, but we must be willing to hear them if we are going to have a dialogue and be accountable.

I realize that police have faced a lot of criticism lately, and that it can be hard to hear and it often makes us defensive. However, if we can take a step back and listen to what is being shared, it can help bring about much needed changes. I know that it is hard work, but it is necessary if police are going to be accountable to the public that they serve.

So, I am saying that today, because I am raising a concern and criticism of the Board of Police Commissioners. I am here because I am deeply disappointed with the state of affairs that we find ourselves in today.

I have two main concerns:

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1) We have a Board of Police Commissioners that is not challenging police when they need to be challenged. The Board is made up mostly of members of City Council. You are elected officials who represent our interests on that Commission so I am asking you to take responsibility for being more proactive in police management and accountability. We have officers who have been convicted of assault on our police force which is unacceptable. I don't know that adding a few people to the Board will fix this problem.

2) If there are to be changes to the Board's structure, I ask that you consider not just adding a few more people, but that you consider WHO those people are. For example, it is not enough to reserve one spot for an Indigenous member on this Board. And what about the growing population of newcomers to our city. It is important that we have a Board that is representative of the community that police serve. The present Board is made up mostly of Caucasian men such as me. That doesn't represent the demographics of our city.

I will close by thanking the Councillors' for their recognition of a problem with the Board of Police Commissioners and for responding to criticisms that were raised to them about the assault on a 13 year-old child by officer Magee. It is important to listen to our citizens, and we are here as citizens asking for much needed reform of this Commission. I hope that this is part of a much larger change in policy. Until then, we will have a police force that is out of touch with a large portion of the city's population with no effective mechanism to hold the force responsible. Thank you.