



**July 10, 2020**

**To: Mayor Jenny Durkan**

**CC: Senior Deputy Mayor Mike Fong, City Budget Director Ben Noble**

**From: Carmen Best, Chief of Police**

**RE: Assessing Impacts of Proposed Council Budget Actions to Cut SPD's Budget by 50%**

While the Seattle Police Department (SPD) is still assessing the potential cuts the Seattle City Council will offer, there are clear and urgent public safety issues I must make you aware of to inform the broader budget discussion.

With little to no engagement with SPD, Council has articulated a plan to cut SPD's 2020 budget by 50%. The SPD is fully committed to assisting the City in meeting its budget needs for the remainder of 2020, as well as engaging in a broad community-led discussion around re-envisioning community safety. Truly transforming policing into a system that meets communities' needs, particularly communities of color, should only be done with a solid plan, not through a budget cut.

These 2020 cut scenarios by the Council are political gestures, however, not realistic or rational solutions. SPD is absolutely committed to transforming the department and has already started the process. But if we are asked to cut 50% of our department overnight, we will be forced into decisions that do not serve our shared long-term goal of re-envisioning community safety.

The true impact of these cuts is amplified by the short time remaining in 2020 to achieve and operationalize these reductions. As you well know, 82 percent of our budget is personnel, so with \$20 million in savings already identified by your office, the only way we could achieve the added Council reductions in 2020 is through severe cuts to our sworn and civilian workforce.

Below, I outline how we would achieve these reductions and still support the department's core service: 911 emergency response.

### Overall Impact

The proposed \$50 to \$80 million additional council budget cuts, together with the identified \$20 million cut, represents a 100 percent cut in the total budget for the fourth quarter. The only way we can achieve that level of cut within the last four months of the year is to terminate or transfer approximately 1,100 employees – or over 50 percent of our total workforce. This would leave us with about 630 deployable sworn members in the department.

### Patrol Operations Impact

Currently, there are approximately 775 sworn members in the Patrol Operations Bureau. Even at that staffing level, we often are stretched to respond to emergency calls in our target response time of seven minutes.

Under the proposed budget cuts, my only option that does not sacrifice public safety would be to do all that we can to maintain the staffing in Patrol. Given the potential reductions would have the entire department function with less personnel than are currently in Patrol, we would have to take drastic action to maintain patrol capacity. It also is important to remember that through labor rules, our newest, most broadly diverse officers are in patrol, and they will be the first we are forced to terminate.

- Close the Southwest Precinct
  - The Southwest Precinct was opened in 2003, and previously the West Seattle area was served by the South Precinct. Currently, the Southwest Precinct is staffed by 100 sworn employees. Re-distributing these 100 employees to the remaining four precincts would help offset some of the impact of the cuts.
- 911 Response
  - Patrol Operations staffing would have to focus exclusively on 911 response. We would have to significantly cut or eliminate Bike Units, Foot Beats, Community Policing Teams, and Anti-Crime Teams.

I understand there is a belief that on the average day officers respond to very little violent crime. First, there is no average day. Anyone who has served this City as first responder knows that each day is different. Yes, through working with people in every neighborhood, officers have helped achieve a community with comparatively low levels of violent crimes. Each violent crime is one too many, and they do take a significant amount of personnel resources when they occur.

I see no feasible option where non-sworn individuals respond to and investigate these tragedies. Additionally, no one knows when a mass casualty event is going to happen. When one thinks about the mass shooting at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Pine earlier this year, and how officers rushed in and saved lives, I cannot imagine what would have happened if there had been half the number of officers available to respond.

The community is asking the department to transition aspects of our 911 response out of patrol. As a department, we know there are better options for people experiencing behavioral health crisis or struggling with addiction. We also know police will not solve issues of affordability and homelessness. I also know, however, that service providers have told officers they are glad they are there by their side in many of these incidents. Until we have thoughtfully designed a new approach for these events, one that acknowledges the realities of a major city, it is reckless to end the department's involvement in them by defunding them.

#### Investigations Impact

There are 215 sworn members serving in the Criminal Investigations Bureau. These are the detectives who gather the evidence necessary to identify subjects, find missing persons, arrest child pornographers, recover stolen property, and help families of homicide victims get justice.

In reality, under these budget cuts, it would make sense to eliminate the entire Bureau and focus on ensuring there were enough 911 responders. However, I cannot do that in good faith, knowing the impact it would have on victims and our ability to prevent future criminal behavior. I would maintain some level of investigative capacity in the following units:

- Homicide/Violent Crime – This is the priority work of the bureau, but it would have to be significantly cut, likely in half to less than 25 sworn members.

- Sexual Assault & Sex Offenders – This unit likely will have to be reduced in half to less than 10 sworn members.

Under the proposed Council cuts I can see no way to maintain the functions of the following investigative units:

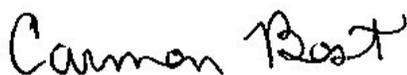
- Auto Theft Investigations – We currently solve a high percentage of these cases and recover vehicles. This work will have to be left to patrol officers when they are not responding to calls for service.
- Burglary/Theft - This work will have to be left to patrol officers when they are not responding to calls for service.
- Domestic Violence / Elder Abuse / Family Services – I would put this responsibility on our reduced Violent Crime detectives, but it could not persist as a stand-alone unit.
- Fraud / Forgery – This function would have to be eliminated. I would ask regional and federal partners to pick up this work if possible.
- Gang Unit – This unit, staffed with 18 officers, is the primary team addressing shots fired. This work would have to be folded into the reduced Violent Crime team, and addressed when possible by patrol.
- High Risk Victims / Internet Crimes Against Children – The ICAC unit is a national leader and addresses wide-spread victimization of children; however, it could not be maintained. I would ask regional and federal partners to pick up this work.
- Narcotics – Patrol would need to respond to and address all trafficking of illicit substances. I would ask our federal partners, particularly the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to play a larger local role.
- Vice – All work on addressing illegal gambling and the sexual trafficking of adults would need to be addressed by Patrol and by our federal partners.

#### Other Units

I see no feasible way under the Council's proposed cuts to maintain the following units in any fashion:

- Harbor Unit – The Harbor Unit responds to criminal and other emergency events in all of Seattle's immediate waterways. We would have to leave this responsibility to the Seattle Fire Department. The SFD does not currently have immediate access to Lake Union or Lake Washington.
- Traffic Unit – We would have to rely on transportation experts to use education and engineering to address pedestrian and vehicular safety. There would be insufficient personnel to staff special events, including sporting events, in the City of Seattle.
- SWAT Team – The SWAT team responds to barricaded subjects, mass casualty events, and other large-scale incidents. We would have to rely on our local partners to support us with their SWAT teams in these situations.

Sincerely,



Carmen Best  
Chief of Police  
Seattle Police Department