Re: FY2021 Boston Police Department Budget

To the honorable City Council:

Families for Justice as Healing is led by incarcerated women, formerly incarcerated women, and women with incarcerated loved ones. Our mission is to end the incarceration of women and girls. Our office is proudly based in Roxbury.

Our members have experienced incarceration themselves and have loved ones who are incarcerated. Our members are also survivors of homicide victims, domestic violence, and sexual violence. As people who have caused harm and experienced harm we are in consensus: policing and incarceration cannot address the root causes of harm in our community. Continued investment in policing and incarceration will only cause more harm.

Our founder Andrea James, a lifelong Roxbury resident, writes: “Continuing to increase funding to police and prisons while continuing to provide zero funding to communities, is an ineffective and fiscally irresponsible strategy. It is proven to only cause further harm with no economic benefit and no stopping of the deaths in our neighborhoods. If police and prisons funding did stop these things, it would have demonstrated itself by now as a successful strategy. It has not. Either we are working toward intentional and effective ways to advance the lives of all of our residents of Boston, MA, or the power brokers are being clear with us that the only intention is to oppress and control.”

Families for Justice as Healing asks the City Council not to pass a FY21 budget with a single dollar authorized for Boston Police Department overtime. That $60 million must be reinvested in Black and Brown communities, through a community-led process. Our members have organized against overtime spending for years. Now, in the middle of a global pandemic when Boston residents are still sick, struggling, and suffering we cannot accept the City Council rubberstamping the Mayor’s budget with this level of spending on law enforcement.

Boston spends more per capita on policing than New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles and Atlanta at cost of $596 per person for FY21. This spending is at the expense of Black and Brown residents who simultaneously have to live in under resourced communities while enduring racist profiling, unconstitutional stops and searches, constant surveillance which amounts to stalking, and the threat of violence and abuse at the hands of mostly white men in plainclothes jumping out of SUVs. Your constituents want something different.

Families for Justice as Healing members are leading a transformative justice project from the heart of the most incarcerated neighborhoods in the Commonwealth. Community members are working on alternatives to dealing with interpersonal harm that don’t involve the police, courts, and jails. Black women are leading a beautiful process that will transform our neighborhoods. Most impacted residents have the solutions, and just need the resources.

Boston Police Commissioner William Gross’ recent comments embody the culture of law enforcement in Boston. Commissioner Gross said he doesn’t care if people get sick and die, just because they are accused of a crime. The Boston Police Department dehumanizes and demonizes residents while blaming and shaming our communities. Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan are represented in the media as bad, dangerous, and violent neighborhoods.

What is never acknowledged by the Commissioner, or represented in the media, or funded by the City of Boston is residents working together to feed each other’s families; residents organizing to protect each other from eviction; residents caring for each other’s children; residents raising money for each other’s health care; residents supporting each other to heal from trauma; residents stepping up for each other to resolve conflict; residents coming together when one of us is facing a court case; residents funding a small business we depend on; residents meeting on nights and weekends to discover what different looks like; residents surrounding each other with love and support in spite the city’s disinvestment and disregard.

This is the year to demand accountability and transparency from the Boston Police Department, including data collection and reporting. This is the year to end pre-textual traffic stops. This is the year to insist that we don’t rely on the Boston Police Department for public health and mental health services, and do not allow arrest rates do not return to pre-COVID19 levels. This is the year to make housing a right, not a reward. This is the year to make it Boston city policy that we don’t respond to poverty and addiction with policing. This is the year to stop funding police overtime, and start investing in what communities really need to be safe and healthy: housing, education, and economic development.

Families for Justice as Healing staff and members have the lived experience and the expertise to talk with members of the Council about what’s happening on the ground in in our neighborhoods, what different looks like, and strategies to reinvest in our communities.

Sincerely,

Mallory Hanora
Executive Director