

2020 CALL FOR BELLINGHAM POLICE DIVESTMENT/COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT

Defund BPD Coalition

2020 has brought to light the many challenges we face as a community. As a coalition we recognize the vast injustices within our current systems, and call to action our elected officials who have the power to effect change. It is our local government who must initiate alternative methods to heal our racial and social prejudices systemically. We demand that the City of Bellingham answer the call.

Per the national movement in Defense of Black Lives, we bring our attention to the Bellingham Police Department's 34 million dollar budget. This 36% of the city's general budget is severely inflated and must be divested, reallocating the funds to supporting community members left behind. As such, the Defund BPD Coalition stands in solidarity with the demands laid out by the national Black Lives Matter movement and local POC leadership calling for defunding the police in Bellingham:

We call for at least a 50% cut to Bellingham Police Department funding for the 2021-22 budget and a reallocation of those funds towards community-led health and safety systems, as well as other programs for community wellbeing.

We reject the argument that the City of Bellingham isn't responsible for many services including mental health and substance abuse programming, which is currently managed by Whatcom County. We further reject the argument that the City of Bellingham has no effect on the entities that control the education, housing and job security programs in our area. We urge city officials to admit their laxity as complicity, and to restore their integrity and perceived good faith from the community by realizing these demands.

We expect funding to be reallocated from BPD to these programs, in ways that may include funding community organizations who can handle the infrastructure of program creation and/or expansion.

OUTLINE OF SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS FOR COMMUNITY AID REINVESTMENT

We offer the following list of alternatives to policing: services that support our community through caring and proactive, rather than punitive, systems.

Expanded mental health services:

We need a fully functioning mobile mental health crisis team outside of law enforcement that is staffed 24 hours per day and serves people experiencing mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence crises (similar to Eugene, Oregon's CAHOOTS program). This would require changing 911 dispatch policies so that the police are no longer the first responders for these kinds of crises. We also call for an expanded mental health crisis stabilization center that can

meet the community's mental health needs. Lastly, we demand funding for a mental health and substance abuse peer support program.

Safe, secure, and affordable housing for our community:

We call for an end to sweeps, instead prioritizing health and safety for current encampments. We need allocation for new spaces to host more tiny home villages. We also demand renovations on currently unused buildings of 20 or more units for community members who are without housing or at risk to lose housing, with paid staff to manage the buildings and provide resources for tenants (per the demands of Homes Now!).

Expanded substance abuse treatment and harm reduction services:

We demand expansion of our mobile harm reduction program. Harm reduction services, such as clean needle exchange programs, are low cost and effective ways to support the safety of our community. Substance abuse treatment is also woefully inadequate for people who can't afford quality treatment. We call for funds to be allocated for creating an inpatient treatment facility for people with co-occurring disorders. This program must use evidence-based treatment modalities and be a free service for people who can't afford treatment.

Community and Cultural Spaces for Black and Indigenous Folks:

We demand the creation of cultural and community spaces/centers for Black and Indigenous members of our community: spaces that center Black and Indigenous voices, celebrate culture, history, and connection. These spaces would strengthen and support communities that have experienced systemic violence and oppression, as a means to provide resilient community-building.

Supporting Black and Indigenous Economic Development:

We demand the creation of economic development services for Black and Indigenous people in Bellingham. This would consist of creating an economic equity grant program for BIPOC business incubation, as well as hiring a staff member as a liaison for BIPOC business development and intergovernmental affairs. Black and Indigenous people have been systematically disenfranchised, experiencing loss of land and hindrances to business development, and types of harm which in Bellingham has included extreme displacement from the region as well as extreme racial violence. Acknowledging this violent history means that we owe black and indigenous community members reparations and material support for developing economic self-sufficiency as a path towards reconciliation, self-determination and sovereignty.

Expanded Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services:

We demand funding to be allocated to services that support survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. We must expand shelter capacities and permanent housing. We need to implement a restorative justice model for domestic violence and sexual assault cases, housed outside of the legal system. We need to invest in accessible violence prevention education and perpetrator treatment programs run by community organizations, rather than the legal system.

These programs will offer survivors the capacity to rebuild trust in community systems of support enough to feel safe engaging in society.

Worker's Cooperatives:

We demand the city to invest in the development of a worker's cooperatives incubation program that serves marginalized communities, including BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and economically oppressed people. Worker co-ops not only can mitigate the regional effects of recession, serving as a preventative measure towards keeping people from needing other emergency-based social services, but they also tend to facilitate higher rates of business ownership by women, people of color, and other systematically oppressed people. By de-stratifying organizational power and empowering the communities who are akin to their service goals, worker co-ops reduce inequality while building regional resilience to economic turbulence, and community resilience through shared accountability for personal safety.

Food Sovereignty Programs:

Food Sovereignty is defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally-appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems." As such, it's important we address both aspects of this concept: 1) the right to food security and 2) the health and wellbeing of farmworkers.

We need to reallocate funds to programs that ensure citizens have access to affordable and nutritious food with no strings attached. Though Bellingham Food Bank is a great resource for able-bodied folks who have access to transportation and kitchen use, the lack of reliable access to nutritious, ready-to-eat meals for marginalized people must be addressed. We demand a program that brings prepared food to encampments and other places with high-density homeless populations.

On the notion of sustainable food systems, we demand reallocation to the Community to Community Development (C2C) Food Sovereignty Program. This funding will ensure that local farmworkers are being properly compensated for their labor, as they are principal actors in our economy and food production system.

Community Land Trusts:

Community Land Trusts are a way to ensure affordable housing for communities in perpetuity, as well as create community equity, empowerment and engagement through active stewardship of buildings and land. We urge the city to invest in the development and expansion of community land trusts supporting local urban and rural land acquisition projects. These land acquisitions can create more safe, inclusive and sustainable neighborhoods, commercial spaces and community facilities. This is an innovative means to provide housing as well as economic security, community development and public safety to the citizens of Bellingham.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Education and Youth Program Development:

We demand a diverse offering of youth and educational programming in Bellingham to bolster the self-development, empowerment, and community and environmental engagement of Bellingham's youth. These must be offerings that help give youth more agency over their lives and over their position in society, while also further ensuring access for youth of color. Likewise, we demand Black and Indigneous programing and curriculum in the school system, developed by members of those communities, allowing youth access to a fuller understanding of local, regional, and global history.

Expansion of Early Childcare Education and Before & After School Care programs:

In support of the vision of the Child and Family Action Plan, County Council adopted the following first action step: Establish new structures and processes to elevate the well-being of all children and families as a county priority. This will require a richer understanding of who in our community has access to opportunities and what structural barriers are in place preventing certain children and families from full access to the thriving start. Children benefit in terms of social, emotional and educational outcomes from attending early learning and childcare. This echoes out to create sustainable families, where parents are able to maintain a stable household and childcare workers have secure jobs.

The programs outlined above are examples of what would make our community truly equitable, safe, and thriving. Our coalition continues to do research on each program, and we intend to share more in-depth proposals offering examples of community groups or organizations that are best equipped to enact these programs, as well as specific funding amounts. There are many other community programs and ideas for how to use funds from the BPD budget in a way that prevents crises and suffering, as well as promotes health, wellbeing, and prosperity for marginalized communities, rather than arresting them. We expect you to listen to the needs and ideas of the community when forming budgets. We look forward to receiving your response to these demands.

Sincerely,
Defund BPD Coalition

Bellingham Alternative Library
Imagine No Kages (INK)
Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Whatcom
Socialist Alternative Bellingham and Whatcom
Whatcom Democratic Socialists of America (WDSA)
Whatcom Human Rights Task Force (WHRTF)
Whatcom-Skagit General Defense Committee