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Minneapolis community members testify for hours in support of real solutions to violence and addiction, not more police

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Minneapolis, MN—This evening, more than fifty Minneapolis residents demanded that the City Council send Mayor Jacob Frey’s budget back to him with major amendments to invest in programs that will truly make the city safer, instead of funding more police. The council heard more than three hours of public testimony, with the majority of testifiers urging the city to invest in affordable housing, solutions to the opioid crisis and mental health crises, violence prevention, and protections for workers instead of pouring $8 million into MPD for 14 more officers.

During the city council hearing, testifiers unfurled a large copy of the budget with “Void” stamped across it. “This morning, a group of us took Mayor Frey’s budget back to his office and returned it to him, “ said Valentina McKenzie of Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL). “We deserve better than what he’s offering us. We’re asking you to join us. Amend this budget so that when it lands on Mayor Frey’s desk again, it reflects the kind of city we deserve to live in.”

Later, thirteen community members walked up to the dais and delivered a stack of petitions to each council member, signed by nearly 700 Minneapolis residents who support Reclaim the Block’s demands.

Throughout the hearing, community members spoke to many urgent needs facing Minneapolis communities, including the shortage of truly affordable housing, the need for year-round trans equity staffing at the city, and the escalating opioid crisis.

“I’m here to ask, personally, for you to get more creative,” said Seneca Krueger, a trauma therapist who works with Southside Harm Reduction. “If adding more police officers worked, we wouldn’t need to keep increasing funding for them. Let’s start funding organizations that are working from the ground up. The communities we serve have been criminalized enough, as a result of being unhoused and having issues with addictions.”

Community members contrasted the success of these kinds of community safety programs with MPD’s well-documented record of failure and abuse.

“MPD has a track record of failing our communities. This is not about Chief Arradondo,” said Charles Frempong-Longdon, a member of Black Visions Collective. “If it was important to MPD to process 1700 untested rape kits, they would have already done it. If it was important to MPD to put more beat cops in neighborhoods getting to know neighbors and building trust, they would
have already done it. Instead, MPD decided to target Black people downtown with low-level marijuana stings. Just last month, MPD decided to tear down camps where our neighbors are sleeping in tents and confiscating their belongings, right when the cold Minnesota winter was setting in and shelters were full."

Instead of hiring 14 new officers, Reclaim the Block is calling on the council to:

1. Fund violence prevention.
2. Invest in youth homelessness services instead of criminalizing young people.
3. Fund solutions to the opioid crisis at the scale of the crisis.
4. Send a mental health response team, not police, when our neighbors experience mental health crises.
5. Enforce wage theft laws that protect workers.

Reclaim the Block’s demands have been endorsed by Black Visions Collective (BLVC), Center for Prophetic Imagination, Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL), Council on American Islamic Relations MN (CAIR-MN), Inquilinxs Unidxs por Justicia, Jewish Community Action (JCA), the Kaleo Center for Faith and Justice, the Minneapolis Catholic Worker, Showing Up for Racial Justice-Twin Cities (SURJ TC), and Take Action MN.

The next step in the city budget process is the budget markup at 10am on Friday morning, when council members can introduce and vote on amendments to the Mayor’s budget. The final budget hearing will take place on December 11th at 6:05 pm, when the City Council will vote on the amended 2020 budget.

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