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****All quotes attributable to Defund WPD****

Statement from Defund WPD on Worcester's Fiscal Year 2021 Budget

Tonight the city council voted to increase the Worcester Police Department's budget by \$254,320 for the 2021 fiscal year, despite significant, sustained public outcry opposing this move. The city council ignored four hours of public comment and the voices of hundreds of Worcester residents who called and emailed expressing their opposition to this budget. We are disappointed but not surprised.

The clearest way for a city to demonstrate its morals to its residents is through its budget. Tonight, the council demonstrated that its values are out of touch with its constituents. After weeks of residents expressing their concerns over this budget allocation, the city council has decided to value policing over people.

The decision to increase the police budget to \$53 million while departments like Public Health, Elder Affairs, and Health and Human Services are each funded at less than \$1 million - not to mention the city's funding of the Worcester Public Schools at just 0.17 percent above the legally required minimum - demonstrates that city leaders are not listening to the needs of the broader Worcester community, especially in the midst of a pandemic, recession, and the Black Lives Matter movement.

City officials defended their decision by comparing crime and arrests today to 2015, suggesting that city programs focused on jobs and youth intervention have led to a safer Worcester. This is what we are asking for: more investment in the programs that address systemic racism and prevent crime while drastically decreasing the city's reliance on reactive policing.

Defund WPD envisions a city where all residents are happy, healthy, and safe because they have access to stable housing, livable wages, affordable healthcare, and social support systems. We will continue advocating for future budgets that redistribute police funding to the departments and community groups that provide essential services without perpetuating harm and violence.

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