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All quotes, unless otherwise noted, are attributable to the Defund WPD group

750 Worcester Residents Sign onto Records Request Demanding that the Worcester Police Release their Database of Citizen Complaints and Disciplinary Records to the Public

Ending systemic racism in our law enforcement community starts by improving its transparency

Worcester, MA - Defund WPD has collected 750 signatures from Worcester residents -- and over 1,200 total -- as part of a community-wide public records request seeking the immediate public release of the Worcester Police Department's database of citizen complaint histories, excessive force reviews, and disciplinary records of Worcester police officers. Defund WPD submitted the records request to City Manager Edward Augustus, the entire City Council, and Police Chief Steven Sargent on Friday, September 25.

"As a young Black man who spends a lot of time in and around Worcester, it is very troubling to know that the police are in no way transparent with the community regarding recorded cases of excessive force," said Defund WPD member Donroy Ferdinand, Jr. "Not releasing the records to the public only serves to send the message that both elected and appointed city officials care more about covering for its expensive and violent police force than its most marginalized citizens. Transparency is the first step to holding the WPD accountable."

Public release of these records has been repeatedly upheld by the Massachusetts courts. In his May 1, 2003 court decision in the lawsuit Worcester Telegram & Gazette Corporation vs. Police Chief of Worcester and City of Worcester, Justice Joseph A. Grasso, Jr. wrote, "It would be odd, indeed, to shield from the light of public scrutiny as 'personnel [file] or information' the workings and determinations of a process whose quintessential purpose is to inspire public confidence." We fully agree and are only requesting those parts of the database determined by earlier court decisions to be public information.

Despite these legal precedents, Worcester has a long history of shrouding both on-duty and off-duty police misconduct in secrecy, violating both state open records laws and the public trust. The City of Worcester has spent the last two years in court fighting the release of the complaint histories of 17 local police officers to the Worcester Telegram & Gazette. Defund WPD's request also calls on the City to end this waste of taxpayer dollars.

Publicly, Worcester's leadership claims that Worcester's police are different, that widespread misconduct does not happen here, despite multiple incidents of excessive force by Worcester Police officers coming to light in just the last three months. In July, a passerby videotaped a police officer striking a mental health patient on a stretcher on Main Street. In August, local media reported on an incident where video evidence demonstrated that police officers used excessive force and falsified arrest reports related to the arrest of a Latino man trying to enter his apartment building last October. This week, local news reported on a lawsuit charging two WPD officers with forcefully pulling a 10 year old child with autism from a vehicle, tossing him to the pavement, kneeling on him, and fracturing his arm.

Just last week, those same city officials who deny the WPD's patterns of systemic racism, misconduct and civil rights abuses sat in executive session discussing twelve ongoing lawsuits against the WPD. Over the past ten years, litigation against the WPD has cost Worcester taxpayers at least \$4 million, syphoning needed dollars away from underfunded city departments, initiatives and community programs.

"By increasing the department's budget earlier this summer despite fervent protest, and allowing the department to operate with zero transparency, the city's leaders are creating a culture that reeks of corruption and lawlessness," said

Worcester resident Molly Bond, another member of Defund WPD. "It is dangerous for the City of Worcester to withhold this type of information."

As Worcester residents we can easily go online to our state's physician profiles database to review a doctor's history, including documentation of Board discipline, criminal convictions, hospital discipline and medical malpractice payments reported to the Board. Similar information is available on police officers, has been ruled by the highest courts in the state to be public record, and needs to finally be treated as such by local government officials.

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Defund Worcester Police Department (Defund WPD) formed in June 2020. We are an independent collective of Worcester community members, and we are committed to divestment from police and investment in community-led safety initiatives and critical social services. The Movement 4 Black Lives has made it clear that it is critical for cities to divest from police in order to protect our community from systemic racism and other forms of state-sanctioned violence. We are a solidarity group of white allies and People of Color (POC) dedicated to Black Lives Matter and to the abolitionist demands of organizations like the Movement 4 Black Lives, Critical Resistance, 8 to Abolition, and Reclaim the Block. We are fueled by the uprisings around the country calling for an end to police violence, by police brutality in our own community, and by the sustained increases to the Worcester Police Department's budget. We oppose reliance on armed law enforcement officers to solve our community's problems, and we are dedicated to finding transformative ways to empower our Worcester community.