



The Honorable Kelly Girtz  
The Honorable Patrick Davenport  
The Honorable Mariah Parker  
The Honorable Melissa Link  
The Honorable Allison Wright  
The Honorable Tim Denson  
The Honorable Russell Edwards  
The Honorable Andy Herod  
The Honorable Ovita Thornton  
The Honorable Mike Hamby

June 9, 2020

Via Email

**Re: Divesting in policing and reinvesting in communities**

The Honorable Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commissioners,

We write in support of the budget proposal put forward by Commissioners Parker and Denson, as an important step in re-visioning public safety for all communities. Policing is a deeply troubled American institution, and one that has proven frustratingly resistant to reform. It's time to reimagine the role, responsibilities, and presence of police officers in the everyday lives of Black and Brown people.

We need to fundamentally change the role of police in our society, and that role has to be smaller, more circumscribed, and less funded with taxpayer dollars. Money saved from reducing the size and scope of police departments must be reinvested into community-based services that are better suited to respond to actual community needs. Doing so will foster improved safety and health outcomes, and present opportunities in Black communities, where decades of underinvestment in everything except police has helped fuel a mass incarceration crisis.

It has become clear, after repeated attempts at other interventions, that divesting from the police and reinvesting in more effective community supports produces the best strategies we have available for making our communities safer. The current state of police forces is such that not only do they themselves too often inflict harm -especially on Black Americans, but also the fear of the police leaves many people without any resources to turn to in a crisis, again this disproportionately affects Black Americans who often need those resources the most due to the economic and health care impacts of systematic white supremacy.

We must divest in traditional, armed policing and instead reinvest those same budgetary resources in alternatives that meet the varied needs of community members before and during crises. It fails to make sense to have armed officers directing traffic in a 5k, and it's simply dangerous to have armed officers responding to mental health crises or other social ills like homelessness. We're aware of the six fatal shootings by your government's sworn officers in 2019. We can't ask the police to do a job where care is called for, and we can't address the root causes of crime by over policing communities ravished by inequality.

The budget proposal that Commissioners Parker and Denson put forward is the best and most serious effort at tackling this problem currently on the table anywhere in our state. We urge you to enact this bold, thoughtful plan, rather than accept the status quo that results in countless dehumanizing encounters each year: over 1000 annual police killings and tens of millions of lives devastated by mass incarceration.

There is another way to keep our communities safe, and this plan is a great step forward. Please include the \$50,000 request in this budget to fund a committee to develop an implementation plan to shrink the size of the police force by 50% over 10 years, deauthorize vacant officer positions, create a new co-responder unit, bring 911 dispatching under public control, and create a new social work position in the Public Defender's office. We urge you to pass this plan.

Thank you for considering the wisdom we've gained in 100 years of working to make the Bill of Rights a reality for every American. We hope you rise to the immensity of this moment in our country's history.

For Justice,



Andrea Young  
Executive Director  
ACLU of Georgia



Christopher Bruce  
Political Director  
ACLU of Georgia