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July 17, 2020

Attention: York Regional Police Service Board

Dear Virginia Jackson,

We are living in a time of great pain and also great opportunity for change.

As we witness what is occurring with the response to the violent death of George Floyd and many others in the United States, we also experience our own challenges with anti-Black¹ and anti-Indigenous racism and violence perpetuated here in Canada – both in policing and across all institutions and systems in our country. From healthcare, to child welfare, to education – both Black and Indigenous communities experience negative outcomes as a result of systemic structural racism. This is felt also in policing and it is not just a large city challenge, this is a challenge for all communities to grapple with, including ours here in York Region.

In York Region, the York Regional Police has an opportunity to be a leader in anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism in policing and police governance, and as a key community partner and institution in our Region. We recognize there has been work up to now, but this work needs to dig deeper and drive towards more action. This work now needs to acknowledge and accept that institutional racism exists. It needs to be openly understood that there is deep rooted racial injustice in policing as it relates to how Black and Indigenous people are policed in our communities.

We would like to ask that York Regional Police take deliberate and strategic action, in partnership with community, to work towards the eradication of its own institutional racism “to ensure all our citizens feel safe and secure” by practicing racial justice in policing which will benefit all in our communities.

There are opportunities presented now to take direct action in the following areas related to policing and police governance.

¹ Blackness and Black Identity is multiple and intersecting. Note that there is also a second layer of prejudice and discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone (colourism).

- 1) Hiring and promotion - Black and Indigenous police officers and leaders must be hired and promoted. In the search for replacement of deputies, for example, place a priority on finding candidates that reflect this gap; be intentional.
- 2) Pay close attention to workplace equity – the York Regional Police’s workforce needs to reflect the diversity of its residents, including across the breadth (functions and departments) and depth (hierarchy) of the institution. We are all hearing the calls to defund the police as numerous activists are highlighting that policing is not reformable due to its inherent and longstanding history of failing to “serve and protect” Black, Indigenous and other racialized communities. According to the 2018 York Regional Police Census & Inclusion Survey, over 73% of the organization is Caucasian and just 18.7% of the organization is Racialized. Compared to the representation of racialized people in York Region’s population, which is 49.16%. In 2020, of the approximately 2000 uniform officers (not including civilian members), only 18% are racialized. With only 18% racialized officers, it is unreasonable to expect those to serve a diverse York Region population of approximately 49%.
- 3) Review and reassess processes and training – a thorough review of internal processes and training specifically tied to anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism must be conducted. This is beyond unconscious bias; this is examining systemic institutional racism and the cultural transformation required to effect change. Consider an external review in partnership with community. Do this work with a true anti-racist lens from a stance of recognizing that racism and privilege exists in our systems rather than a stance of defensiveness.
- 4) Police in schools – the narrative that police officers are “good for young people to see from early” is not part of the Black community’s collective consciousness. Research shows that police presence in schools is bad news for Black children. See Robyn Maynard’s *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* for a thorough discourse analysis on policing in Education as a starting point. Withdraw uniformed police officers from York Regions schools. In a society where Black Canadians are over represented in the prison system, Black children are already seeing themselves as suspect and the presence of police officers exacerbate this and hinders their development. The call has already been answered in other parts of Canada like British Columbia.
- 5) Develop a meaningful community engagement framework - focus this engagement specifically on increasing community trust and gaining community input from Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities broadly and specifically tied to Black Experience.
- 6) Consider a deeper engagement/research project to follow the 2017 GTA Black Experience project – to really dive deeply into the experiences of Black and Indigenous communities specifically related to law enforcement in York Region we need a more in-depth study. We voiced our concerns regarding the limitations of the Black Experience Project’s York Region component at the community meeting held on March 27, 2019. While good as a general guide, the sample size for York Region was relatively small (175 respondents for a population of 25,870).

The Black community in Newmarket and surrounding areas – like Black communities across the Region, country and worldwide are tired, hurt and looking towards our leaders and systems to make real change. The time is now.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jerisha Grant-Hall', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jerisha Grant-Hall, Chairperson
Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association