

Two days ago, I was made to wait seven hours to give my deputation on anti-Black racism and policing at a special meeting of Waterloo Region Council. While a bit challenging in the context of attending to my very full work day, the time also brilliantly illustrated all of the ways white supremacy works to center itself, as those of us under siege due to anti-Black racism work towards our liberation. When we demand freedom, we are treated as a problem and a threat.

Looking back, I have to thank Chief Larkin for setting up my speaking points so well. The scripted conversation he held with Councillor Vrbanovic at regional council that evening effectively detailed policing's scope creep over the last 30 years, where through wage theft from health, community, and social services, reallocation of essential revenue lines to policing has taken place. Additionally, Chief Larkin's in-depth description of a very recent mental health related incident in Victoria Park potentially breached individual confidentiality through sharing identifiable information, and I sincerely hope that it will be edited from the livestream on the Region's website. Clearly, we need to defund police and rehire community members and professionals to do mutual aid work, and restore decent work to more qualified people in our community, so mistakes like this do not happen. Separately, it's important to point out that Chief Larkin was given latitude to discuss ineffective police training and recruitment initiatives for an hour, lending legitimacy to superficial busy work that will not prevent harm nor stop the deaths of Black people. It has already been proven that police EDI initiatives do nothing to reduce police violence. Implicit bias training which he mentioned many times, is not evidence-based and also proven to be completely [ineffective](#) in reducing violence and killings of Black and Indigenous people. In other words, Chief Larkin presented zero evidence of institutional change in policing's negative impact on local Black and Indigenous lives.

My name is Ruth Cameron. I am the Executive Director of ACCKWA, the AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Area, a member of the African, Caribbean and Black Network Advisory Committee, a doctoral student at Wilfrid Laurier University and a consultant focusing on anti-racism, anti-oppression organizational change management initiatives. I do research on effective ways to improve health and equity for disadvantaged groups, and I build programs and deliver services to communities I am a part of, communities that are disadvantaged by anti-Black racism, police violence and surveillance, and many other forms of inequality. I am also a queer Black single mother of two who has been working on the elimination of anti-Black racism in all of its forms for decades. I'm always pleased to contribute evidence about needed changes for improved public health, social equity and well-being for Africa, Caribbean and Black communities in Waterloo Region, because its vital work.

Recently, Kitchener hosted what was possibly the largest Black Lives Matter solidarity march in Canada. After the march, attendees read and affirmed the calls to action put forth by event

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organizers, sending thousands of letters to elected representatives within the Region. The request was simple: [Stop killing us](#). End the over-policing and surveillance of our neighbourhoods, families and households, on campus, in schools and through community policing programs. Reallocate dollars from the police budget to programs that foster our well-being, by us, for us. After the march, regional and city governments rushed to issue solidarity statements, possibly before understanding our requests. Solidarity however, is demonstrated far more effectively through actions than words.

Racism was a primary concern for me when I came to the Region in 2013. I knew of persistent white supremacist activity in the Region, and wondered how risky it would be to work here. I knew of [Howard Joel Munroe](#), and the unforgivably long time it took for his murderers to be sentenced. I recoiled at the blatantly racist and [coded reporting](#) about the killing of John James, described as “large and violent” in a Record article, by Zachary Schultz - described as a “slight college student”. I knew police released Johnny’s killer from custody before even finishing the investigation, and of their minimal responses to the Slingers, Sons of Odin and other local neo-Nazi hate groups. Non-responses still persist to this day in response to hate and racism in this community, with this week’s call outs by politicians only happening after community members demanded public statements.

I have experienced many instances of over policing in Kitchener. I have been tailed by police for driving while Black, and had police pull into parking lots on four separate occasions to surveil Black people leaving the consultations and events I have hosted with colleagues in the community. I have counted and timed the hourly patrol route of police vans in the Chandler Mowat neighbourhood while at work meetings, and I have experienced an unwelcome police presence at Tri-Pride. I have complained to Chief Larkin about officers intimidating Black ACCKWA volunteers at an agency appreciation event, questioning the right of our communities to gather for recreation and leisure in the park, undoing years of anti-stigma and recruitment work conducted by my staff. I question the ability of police to do anti-racism work, when I have experienced racism from them my entire life, in all of the places I have lived and worked.

In the early 1990s, I was in the Canadian military during the time when the Canadian Airborne Regiment was stationed on a supposed peacekeeping mission in Somalia. I was in horror as the details of the [torture and murder of Shidan Arone came](#) to light. The horror continued the summer I was on base, being trained by and sharing barracks with members of that regiment, who joked about the lynching of a Black youth by the Canadian military. I was terrified for my safety in the military while stationed on a base in Canada, away from home.

Police and military share many roles, methods and equipment, and problems with white supremacists in their ranks. Recently, on July, 3rd I forced myself to watch the video of Abdisalam Omer’s [arrest and beating](#) in his own overpoliced Kitchener neighbourhood at the hands of Waterloo Regional Police, police that were well aware of his mental health issues. My anxiety climbed as I watched the young men filmed in the act of witnessing his arrest alternate between bearing witness, intervening at a distance to protect his safety and turning away, terrified they

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would witness an act of violence they would never be able to un-see or forget, as if witnessing what they did see was not horrifying enough. As Black people, we experience the domestic terrorism of persistent police presence in our lives and communities and police violence and shootings with a regularity that has been declared a public health crisis by the American Public Health Association, the Canadian Public Health Association and many public health units, with the exception of our own. The APHA has declared police defunding and resourcing of community initiatives as the [evidence-based harm reduction solution to police violence](#).

After murdering Shidane Arone, the Canadian military was forced to undergo anti-racism training. This anemic response to the lynching of a youth by soldiers was considered adequate! It appears Regional Council, the Police Services Board and Waterloo Regional Police believe that a larger police budget, more militarized and surveillance equipment, police anti-racism training and diversity initiatives are an adequate and appropriate response to the ongoing violence, neighbourhood surveillance and minimal monitoring of white supremacist activity experienced by Black, Indigenous and racialized communities in Waterloo Region. It is not. Research shows that anti-bias training and diversity/equity initiatives teach police how to mask their biases with socially appropriate responses, while the harm continues. There is plenty of evidence showing police coolly [maiming their own anti-racism trainers](#) at demonstrations, and murdering Black people on camera. Black people are forced to endure this systemic violence and live with the ongoing long-term negative health impacts every day. Most importantly, Mr. Omar, his family and Black people in this community are experiencing mental health impacts from his beating right now, with no declaration from local leaders that these types of experiences are completely unacceptable, and must end immediately.

Like other Black people, I have well-founded fears for my safety, and the safety of my children, friends and communities at the hands of police and white supremacists in our community. I am a mother and a mentor, and I fear traffic stops for myself, for my children, and for the young people I work with. I have observed the silence of police and elected officials to the police beating of Abdisalam, [until publicly called on to respond](#), and the total non-response to white supremacist's intimidation of the Indigenous community in recent weeks at O:se Kenhionhata:Tie Land Back Camp, and have little confidence in gestures of performative allyship. Prove that Black Lives Matter by curbing the ability of the Waterloo Region Police Service to stockpile even more military-grade equipment to use against us, and by replacing police embedded in our communities and schools with community-led public safety models. Ultimately, the Canadian military realized the Airborne Regiment needed to be disbanded. Policing needs to meet the same fate, since [an institution created to control and kill us can never protect us](#). When police defunding and substantial community investment happens, we will know Black Lives Matter beyond the use of a slogan for political clout in Waterloo Region.