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**To:** [CouncilHearing \(CI-StPaul\)](#)  
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## **Crowing one season, crawfishing the next:**

### **Elected leaders are not walking their talk on police reform in St. Paul**

As the unrest unfolded in Minneapolis last summer, Mayor Melvin Carter III and some members of the City Council told us St. Paulites to relax. Our neighbors' reaction to George Floyd's death, and the fierce calls for deep reform of policing that it spawned, shouldn't concern us, they said. In public statements to both local and national media, they reassured us that, in so many words, those reforms *had already happened* in St. Paul.

It turns out this isn't the case. To be sure, Mayor Carter and the Council have made substantive efforts to improve policing in St. Paul, such as implementing common-sense restrictions on the use of force and intensifying BIPOC recruitment for its police academy. But the Community-First Public Safety (CFPS) initiatives that they funded last year with great fanfare — that Carter claims as one of his top priorities — have actually not been fully implemented. These consist of a suite of alternative measures to ensure safety and prevent crime, many of which involve precisely the kind of “unbundling” of public safety from the police department that Minneapolisians were calling for. Others, like the Right Track youth jobs program, were meant to get at the root causes of criminal activity, which Carter himself claims to focus on.

To say that these CFPS efforts have not been implemented is not hyperbole: As reported in the press, they've mostly been delayed, altered, or cancelled. More than a quarter of the funds approved for their 2020 rollout were shaved off. And now, in his 2021 budget, Carter proposes to continue the anemic launch of this so-called signature initiative, cutting it relative to last year's funding.

Mayor Carter and councilmembers cannot have it both ways. They cannot crow during one season that they're national leaders in police reform, and then crawfish by cutting funds for those same reforms in the next. They aren't walking their talk.

Critics claim that with this year's spike in violent crime, this is not a moment to experiment with public safety. According to Root and Restore St. Paul, the city spends a remarkable 32 percent of its general fund on policing; if anything, these voices say, we should increase this amount and hire more officers.

But there are two problems with this argument. The first is that, currently, much of policing is not focused on preventing or solving violent crimes. As an audit of 911 calls is revealing, the majority of calls to St. Paul police — an estimated 77,000 this year — involve innocuous matters, like barking dogs and parking complaints. Yet police must still process this enormous volume of requests, eroding the amount of time they spend on serious crime. The solution, however, is not to beef up policing: It is to more aggressively unbundle non-violent public safety concerns from their current home in the police department. Significant pieces of CFPS aim to do this, yet our leaders won't forcefully fund and pursue them.

The second problem with this argument is more fundamental. When discerning leaders talk about

the city's response to the last economic downturn, one hears them characterize it as deeply flawed. Under Chris Coleman, St. Paul slashed budgets for recreation centers, youth programming, and much more. As a result, in the wake of the Great Recession, we witnessed a "lost generation" — a cohort of underprivileged youth and young adults who, for the lack of guidance and opportunity, turned to criminal activity. In a city with profound, well-known racial disparities, we abandoned certain neighborhoods in the name of fiscal austerity, reaping a harvest of crime even as the police department's budget grew. We continue to pay the price, these leaders say, for those short-sighted decisions.

Citizens should recognize that, in terms of their priorities during this recession, our leadership is threatening to drive us down that same cursed path. Under the proposed budget, St. Paul would spend more on policing than on libraries, winter street maintenance, youth job development, financial empowerment, citywide recreation programs, BIPOC business development, human rights, and arts and community gardening initiatives *combined*.

Given the negative impact this imbalance will have on public safety, the mayor and council should reconsider the skewed priorities in the proposed budget, which cuts the police department by only 2% but areas like public health and community development by double-digit amounts. At the very least, they could walk their own talk, following through on commitments they proudly boasted about this summer by fully funding CFPS.