



City of Detroit
Detroit City Council
Council Member Angela Whitfield Calloway
District 2

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable City Council
Members of the Public

FROM: Council Member Angela Whitfield-Calloway *AWC*

DATE: May 17, 2023

RE: Statement on Police Indemnification and Settlements

Over the past year, the city of Detroit – and municipalities across the country – has paid out millions of dollars for indemnification and subsequent settlements for police misconduct and other violations.

I, as a Member of the Internal Operations subcommittee, have been present for these payouts every week since I've joined Council. It is my assessment – corroborated by experts on this matter – that the Detroit Police Department and its officers are seldom found liable or held accountable for the damages paid out for misconduct and violations made while in uniform. Detroit taxpayers instead carry that financial burden.

A study done by University of California, Los Angeles School of Law [Professor Joanna Schwartz on Police Indemnification](#) published in the New York University Law Review found that during the study period governments paid over 99.98% of the dollars that plaintiffs recovered in lawsuits alleging civil rights violations by law enforcement. In layman's terms – every day taxpayers pay for nearly all violations made by law enforcement. These findings were reinforced by the Washington Post, which published a report titled '[The hidden billion dollar cost of repeated police misconduct](#)' that showed over a billion dollars of payments for misconduct had been made by cities across the country. This unruly trend is unacceptable.

As the city of Detroit struggles with providing basic services and programs for our residents, it is not in the best financial interest of the city and its residents to shoulder the burden for law enforcement and its misconduct in perpetuity – especially for officers who do not call this city home. As we set to resume our pension obligations and continue strategic investments throughout our city to improve the quality of life of its residents, it is our responsibility to consider all avenues to dampen this ongoing issue.



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We may not have the influence to convince the Supreme Court of the United States to reverse qualified immunity, which has limited the faculty for accountability and mitigation, yet, it is within the power of this body to determine, albeit modify, government spending. It is my intent to stop the hemorrhaging of taxpayer dollars to fund police misconduct and other violations by advocating to commit every dollar paid out for such violations back to the residents of this city in the form of reallocation.

It is my hope that the next budget season will not yield any need for significant reconsiderations as I am confident that our department, the best trained in the country, can reverse course. In the interim, I am prepared to advocate action if violations persist. I hope that my colleagues are also prepared to act on what we CAN control.

Please contact our office if you have any questions or concerns -
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