

DRAFT

NRC Statement: End racially disproportionate policing through changes to appropriations of public funds, August 2020

The Neighborhood Revitalization Commission of the City of La Crosse seeks an end to police actions disproportionately targeting people of color by changing the fundamental assumptions of city budgets.

According to the La Crosse Police Department “2018 Use of Force Report,” 20 percent of the 87 incidents involved Black subjects. In 2019, the “Use of Force Report” showed that 33 percent of the 102 incidents involved Black subjects. According to the Census Bureau, the population of the City of La Crosse who identify as Black or African American is 3.8 percent. Put plainly, this means that the La Crosse Police Department has used force against people of color much more often than it has against whites – in fact, at least three times more often, considering the smaller number of people of color in the overall population of the city. The police data does not address the ways that BIPOC experience the other 13,062 police enforcement actions or traffic enforcement actions.

The Common Council and the Executive Budget Team made decisions in the “2020 Budget Reduction Plan” to distribute ~\$4.5 million in cuts across city departments, choosing to disproportionately defund “quality of life” departments while protecting “safety” departments from cuts. Even before these cuts, the Police Department enjoyed the single highest allocation and claimed nearly one-fifth of the entire departmental operating budget. The Police Department consumed 17 percent of the city department operating budget, a share that is quite high in comparison to other cities, and a share that has grown over time despite decades of decline in violent crime. Between 2019 and 2020, the Police Department budget increased by nearly \$400,000. In the 2020 Budget Reduction Plan, the Library has been cut by almost 12 percent, while the Police Department was reduced by only 0.85 percent.

Since budgets reflect what a community values, for 2021 and 2022, the NRC asks the Common Council and Executive Budget Team to reconsider their assumptions about the meaning of “safety” and “quality of life,” and understand how budget decisions have institutionalized racial disparities for decades, degrading the quality of life for many citizens. The budget memo argued against proportional, across-the-board cuts by stating that “these kinds of cuts serve to harm the Safety aspect of services to the community.” We call on the council and budget team to understand that over-policing is itself a quality of life issue, and over-funding police at the expense of all other city services actually harms our shared safety. The racially disproportionate use of force does not warrant continuation of this unequal expenditure, and certainly does not warrant an increasing disparity of funding in this crisis and for the foreseeable future.

The NRC recommends that the council and budget team reconsider how their idea of “safety” affects BIPOC as they determine spending cuts for 2021 and 2022.