



# UAW Local 4121

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August 10, 2020

Dear Council President González, Public Safety Chair Herbold, and Seattle City Councilmembers:

UAW 4121 represents over 6000 academic workers at the University of Washington, and we have a strong record of fighting for racial justice on campus and throughout Seattle. In that tradition, we join King County Equity Now, Decriminalize Seattle, and the thousands who have taken to the streets in demanding that the Seattle City Council take immediate action to reimagine public safety, with a first step of defunding the Seattle Police Department by at least 50% in the amended 2020 budget and instead reallocate those funds to community led health and safety systems.

The SPD budget has grown dramatically in recent years, even as SPD officers have continued oppressing the city's working people and essential public services have gone underfunded, especially in Black and Brown communities. Millions of working people across the country and around the world are enraged by the murder of George Floyd, and took to the streets to demand a ground-up, anti-racist overhauling of policing and public safety. Our union is proud to support and participate in this movement. The incredible multiracial solidarity of this uprising has driven home the urgency of prioritizing true community safety by defunding the police and investing in social housing, public schools, and community control over crisis intervention and violence prevention.

Here in Seattle, that includes—*but is not limited to*—reducing police presence in schools; renegotiating the police contract to fully realize the 2017 Accountability Ordinance; investing in affordable housing for Black and Brown communities; supporting Black economic development in historically BIPOC neighborhoods; maximizing public land to serve Black-led community organizations; increasing community-led research on equity issues; funding other critical social services for healthcare, jobs, and education; and decreasing the number of police on the force.

The demand to Defund SPD by *at least* 50% and reinvest in the community came out of the surge in the Black Lives Matter movement this summer. Though reducing the police budget alone is far from sufficient, we view it as a necessary first step. We were initially encouraged when seven councilmembers publicly committed to defunding SPD by 50%, and as a first step we expected that commitment to be fulfilled immediately.

Therefore, we are deeply disappointed that many of the same councilmembers have tried to delay the 50% defunding by claiming it would interfere with the Seattle Police Officers Guild

contract. As a public sector union, we recognize this tactic for what it is: management grasping for justification to maintain the status quo. These issues are not new, and we have too long seen both the City and SPOG use collective bargaining as political cover to evade accountability, rather than as it should be -- as one of the strongest tools available to fight for progressive change. We know that defunding SPD is possible—possible *now*—and we reject any attempts to prop up collective bargaining as a politically convenient way to evade accountability.

This hollow excuse is an insult to the labor movement, as our union wields our position at the bargaining table to protect workers and people of color, not our oppressors. In 2018 we joined with community groups and organizations to oppose the rotten SPOG contract, which rolled back accountability measures that were the bare minimum for safer policing in Seattle. This June we voted with the majority of the King County Labor Council to expel SPOG, because their deeply ingrained racism and oppression of working people have no place in our labor movement. Closer to campus, we are building the campaign to defund the University of Washington Police Department, which includes pushing the UW administration to cut all ties with SPD.

SPD has shown that it cannot be reformed, so it must be defunded. This cannot be postponed, for justice delayed is justice denied. We are encouraged by this week's steps to -- among other measures -- eliminate funding to the Navigation Team; however, there is still much more to be done. We must invest in our communities with social housing and vital services, not continued policing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis. We urge other councilmembers to vote for Councilmember Sawant's proposed cuts to SPD in the 2020 budget, and to enact a full 50% defunding of SPD during the coming Fall budget process. The labor movement, in solidarity with the movement to end racist policing, demands it.

Signed,

UAW 4121 Joint Council

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