

Testimony of the Boston Municipal Research Bureau
Before the
Boston City Council's Committee on Ways & Means

JULY 28, 2020

Regarding: Docket #0839, police overtime spending

Chair Bok, Vice Chair Essaibi-George, and Members of the Committee:

Good Morning. My name is Pam Kocher, I am the President of the Boston Municipal Research Bureau. I am also a city resident.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to Docket #0839 regarding police overtime spending.

Many thanks to the City Council, the Walsh Administration, and city employees for all you are doing for our community, particularly at this uncertain and challenging time.

The Research Bureau's mission is very much focused on sound city finances and policy, so that Boston has the resources to do what it needs to do and wants to do, now and in the future, for those who live, work, and learn in our city.

You have just heard the Administration's presentation and the BPD's presentation.

Today I want to share with you how the Research Bureau is thinking about the challenges and opportunities of managing overtime use in the Boston Police Department and meeting community needs, particularly at this challenging time.

To better understand these challenges and opportunities, the Research Bureau continues to seek data on OT. At this time, we seek data on total OT expenses and hours by OT category and the total number of officers who accrued that OT in each category. We also look to better understand the BPD's process for managing OT, including OT approval and oversight processes from the district level all the way up to the Commissioner's office.

Once we receive this data, we will comment more specifically on challenges and opportunities for OT management at the BPD, as it is done today.

What we do know is that local government police departments, including Boston, have struggled over the years with managing overtime. At times, part of that conversation includes whether to meet a community's policing needs through accepting the costs of increased overtime for the existing police force or hiring more officers to expand a department's capacity.

However, real impact is likely to come from taking a broader view:

As Commissioner Gross has said “[The Police Department] wears too many hats.”

The shift of \$12 million in the FY21 budget from the police department to support increased investment in the community's non-policing needs by other departments, such as the Public Health Commission, creates a real opportunity for both more appropriate and efficient service delivery for the community and reduced overtime in a way that simply enhancing OT oversight will never achieve on its own in the police department, and other departments, such as the Public Health Commission, whose focus is addressing non-policing needs.

This allows Boston's highly-trained, well-paid police officers to focus on public safety needs that require their training.

The City should:

- 1) Implement protocols and processes to efficiently and effectively redirect non-policing community needs to the appropriate departments, such as the Public Health Commission, and prepare those other departments to receive and meet those requests.

This infrastructure should be set up as quickly as possible to reduce nonpolicing demands on BPD and maximize the opportunity for other departments with non-policing specialties to reduce the BPD's workload and focus its policing resources on meeting public safety needs.

- 2) Look to identify any positions within the BPD that do not require sworn, highly-trained and well-paid officers to do the job. Public safety dispatch is a common example....and a contentious one as the shift to civilian dispatch decreases the number of positions available solely to police officers.

The Research Bureau looks forward to receiving the data that will allow us to better understand, in more detail, the BPD's process for managing OT, including OT approval and oversight processes from the district level all the way up to the Commissioner's office.

Thank you for your time this morning. I am happy to take any questions.