From:	Jessica Zephyrs
To:	Grp. City Council and City Web Site
Subject:	A letter to Missoula City Council about BLM, the police, and paramilitaries
Date:	Tuesday, June 23, 2020 11:41:16 AM

To the Missoula City Council,

My name is Jessica Zephyrs and I am a resident of Missoula's Ward 3. I am writing to demand that the City Council adopts a budget that prioritizes community well-being and redirects funding away from the police, as well as pursue charges under Montana law (which was passed more than 30 years ago) criminalizing the paramilitaries threatening peaceful protests in our community.

Many Montanans may be tempted to think the unique nature of such a vast, yet sparsely-populated state minimizes the likelihood of police brutality in our small city communities. However, as reported by the Billings Gazette last year, Montana ranked ninth in killings by police per capita. In 2017, the Great Falls Tribune reported Montana police killings reached a total higher than the previous six years. These figures are alarming, but don't tell the full story. Under Montana Code § 2-6-102 and Article II, Section 10 of the Montana Constitution, police disciplinary records are exempt from disclosure if there is an "individual privacy interest that clearly exceeds the merits of public disclosure." Montana police forces operate within a culture of impunity, and as the members of the communities they are supposed to be protecting, we can't even begin to grasp the scope of their violence.

I myself have witnessed Missoula Police draw their weapons on an unarmed Black young adult at a trailhead and act as though his very presence was a threat. There was nothing reported about this incident so there is absolutely no way of knowing why a young man's life was so tenuously handled.

We are in the midst of widespread upheaval over the systemic violence of policing. Empty gestures and suggestions of "reform" are inadequate and unacceptable. I am demanding that real change be made to the way this city allocates its resources.

Support for communities in need is necessary now, more than ever. I am demanding that the City Council meaningfully defund the Missoula Police Department. I join the calls of those across the country to defund the police. I am demanding a budget that adequately and effectively meets the needs of at-risk Missoula residents during this trying and uncertain time. I am demanding a budget that supports community wellbeing, rather than empowering the police forces that tear them apart.

Having worked for years at the Missoula County Public Library, I have seen the positive effects of calling the Poverello Center's emergency HOT Team rather than police because they were better equipped and trained to handle the mental health and addiction crises that often unfolded there.

As the City Council, the budget proposal is in your hands. It is your duty to represent your constituents. I am urging you to completely revise the budget for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, and to fund the social programs proven to be more effective than policing at promoting community safety and equity. Have the courage to be a leader of the change this city, state, and country desperately needs.

We need better mental health services, more affordable housing, fewer guns, and zero militias and vigilantes. If you do nothing, things will not get better. I will be watching for your action and responding with my votes.

Thank you for your time,
Jessica Zephyrs
jrzephyrs@gmail.com
580-548-3878