

Boston Police Department's Budget Undermines Community Relations, Accountability and Oversight: Data and Analysis from 2010-Present

February 25, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the wake of continued police violence and the murders of Terrence Coleman, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, the American people demanded a closer look at police practices and budgets. As law enforcement reform has gained media attention, several major cities across the country have publicly announced the reallocation of certain police resources to community-based initiatives. The City of Boston announced a reallocation of 3% of the overall police budget in the form of approximately \$12 million from the police overtime budget for the fiscal year 2020-2021 (FY21), to be directed towards community programs for youth, persons facing homelessness, and those struggling with the effects of inequality.¹

But is this reallocation meaningful? Without additional information about the financial profile of the city's major public safety agency, and an understanding of its past and current fiscal decisions, the public cannot determine whether the City's \$12 million reallocation will have a material impact on police reform and accountability.

To increase transparency to the public around the fiscal priorities of the Boston Police Department (BPD), Lawyers for Civil Rights (LCR) reviewed BPD budgets for the last decade.

¹ Christopher Gavin, *The Boston City Council Passed the \$3.6 Billion Operating Budget Amid Controversy*, Boston.com (June 25, 2020), <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2020/06/25/boston-city-council-passes-2021-operating-budget>.

LCR discovered that, despite the City’s highly publicized adjustment of the police overtime budget for the current fiscal year, contemporary and historical budgetary decisions demonstrate that Boston focuses overwhelmingly on traditional policing methods² while undervaluing community engagement and oversight. Specifically:

- **BPD’s budget has grown by 46% in the last decade, faster than other major cities, including New York, Chicago, Seattle, Atlanta, and Detroit.** Yet, BPD’s investment in police oversight and community engagement lags behind.
- From FY20 to FY21, **BPD decreased its spending on internal divisions conducting police oversight and community engagement activities, while increasing spending on divisions conducting traditional policing functions.** Analysis of BPD budgets over the last decade similarly shows systemic underinvestment in oversight and community engagement.
- **Compared to other major cities, BPD receives less external funding,** such as state and federal grants, which can be used to deepen and expand community-oriented programs. BPD’s use of external funding for community-based programs has decreased over past years.

This report concludes that, given the size of the BPD budget, the recent \$12 million reallocation from the overtime budget is more performative than meaningful. This is particularly true considering the systemic, data-confirmed defunding and deprioritization of police accountability, oversight and community engagement in favor of traditional policing over the last decade. Boston has prioritized neither community relations nor the monitoring and discipline of its officers.

² “Traditional policing,” as used in this report, refers to police activities with a focus on investigation and arrest.

To remedy these concerns, the City of Boston and BPD should:

1. Reallocate funding away from traditional police activities to focus more on BPD divisions charged with improving community policing, ensuring oversight, and enhancing accountability.
2. Seek external funding³ to support and enhance BPD divisions charged with improving community policing, ensuring oversight, and enhancing accountability.
3. Leverage existing oversight mechanisms, such as the civilian review board, and add additional accountability vehicles such as new oversight units for specialized functions and teams.

I. THE BOSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT HAS EXPERIENCED MORE FINANCIAL GROWTH THAN OTHER MAJOR POLICE DEPARTMENTS NATIONWIDE IN THE LAST TEN YEARS, YET IT HAS TRAILED THOSE CITIES IN COMMITTING TO POLICE OVERSIGHT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

1. Fiscal Year 2020-2021 (FY21) Overall Boston Police Budget

The Boston municipal budget is submitted and reviewed annually by the Boston City Council. The police budget makes up over 10% of the city’s overall budget, making it the second highest spending area after Boston Public Schools.⁴ For FY21, BPD submitted a budget request of \$414,182,025.⁵ This constitutes BPD’s core operating budget, and does not include \$9,082,732 in external funds.

³ “External funding,” as used in this report, refers to funding that is not derived from the city budget, but rather from other public and private sources, including state and federal grants.

⁴ City of Boston Budget Office, *FY21 Operating Budget: Explore Spending*, <https://www.boston.gov/departments/budget/fy21-operating-budget>.

⁵City of Boston Budget Office, *FY21 Proposed Operating Budget - Public Safety*, 263 (2020), <https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2020/04/V3%2012-%2021%20R%20Public-Safety-Cabinet.pdf>.

Amid nationwide debates on how much money should be allocated for police departments, the City of Boston proposed that \$12 million be reallocated from the police overtime budget to various public health and community engagement efforts.⁶ On June 24, 2020, the Boston City Council approved a modified budget of approximately \$404 million.⁷

Although the approved BPD budget is \$404 million, additional municipal funds may be added due to overtime costs that are inherently speculative since the drivers of such costs may be unforeseen events.⁸ In fact, BPD has under-appropriated its overtime budget every year between FY10 through FY19 by an average of over \$13 million (and by as much as nearly \$25 million) and has been forced to reallocate funding to cover the shortfall each year.⁹

⁶ Gavin, *supra* note 1.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Danny McDonald, *As Boston Looks to Cut Spending on Officers' Overtime, Police Officials Say They Have to Back-Fill 94 Positions a Day*, Boston Globe (July 28, 2020), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/07/28/metro/boston-looks-cut-police-ot-city-says-it-has-back-fill-nearly-100-positions-daily/>.

⁹ See, e.g., City of Boston Budget Office, *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget - Public Safety*, 328 (2020), <https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2020/10/V3%2012-%2021%20A%20Public-Safety-Cabinet.pdf>; City of Boston Budget Office, *Fiscal Year 2019 Operating Budget - Public Safety*, 204 (2019), https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/embed/file/2019-04/v3_11-19_a_public-safety-cabinet.pdf; City of Boston Budget Office, *Fiscal Year 2017 Operating Budget - Public Safety*, 194 (2016), https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/embed/file/2016-10/12_public_safety_cabinet.pdf; City of Boston Budget Office, *Fiscal Year 2015 Operating Budget - Public Safety*, 204 (2014), <https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/embed/f/fy15-volume3-public-safety-cabinet.pdf>; City of Boston Budget Office, *Fiscal Year 2013 Operating Budget - Public Safety*, 275 (2012), <https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/embed/f/fy13-volume2-public-safety-cabinet.pdf>; City of Boston Budget Office, *Fiscal Year 2011 Operating Budget - Public Safety*, 57 (2010), https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/embed/f/fy11-volume2-public_safety_cabinet.pdf.

2. BPD 10-Year Budgetary Analysis Compared to Other Major Cities

BPD's budget has grown substantially over the past decade. For FY11, BPD's budget was just under \$276 million.¹⁰ By FY21, the budget has grown by 46.6% to over \$404 million.¹¹ That percentage of increase is greater than that for other police departments in major cities. For example, in the same time-frame, the City of Detroit, which has a population similar to that of Boston, *reduced* funding to its police department by 27.5%.¹² Additionally, New York City's police budget increased by only 17.5% in the past decade,¹³ and Chicago's budget increased by only 24.5%.¹⁴ Seattle's increase of 40.0%¹⁵ and Atlanta's increase of 42.5%¹⁶ over the past decade were closer to Boston's figure, but still substantially less.

¹⁰ This number represents BPD's actual spending, whereas FY21 references in note 11 represent BPD's expected budget. Boston, *Fiscal Year 2013 Operating Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 273.

¹¹ Boston, *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 325.

¹² *Compare* City of Detroit Office of Budget, *Departmental Budget Information – Police* (2012), https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/budget/2013-2014_Executive_Budget_Summary/37%20EBS%2013-14%20Police.pdf (Detroit's FY11 police spending), with City of Detroit Office of Budget, *Four Year Financial Plan 2021-2024 - Legal Budget*, C44 (2020), https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2020-06/3%20-%20FY%202021-24%20Four-Year%20Financial%20Plan%20-%20Section%20C%20Legal%20Budget%20-%20Adopted_1.pdf (Detroit's adopted FY21 police budget).

¹³ *Compare* New York City Finance Division, *Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2013 Executive Budget Police Dept*, 1 (May 17, 2012), <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2012/05/fy2013-056-Police-Department1.pdf> (New York City's 2011 police spending), with New York City Finance Division, *Report to the Committee on Finance and the Committee on Public Safety on the Fiscal 2021 Executive Budget for the New York Police Department*, 2 (May 14, 2020), <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2020/05/FY21-NYPD-Executive-Report-1.pdf> (New York City's FY21 adopted budget).

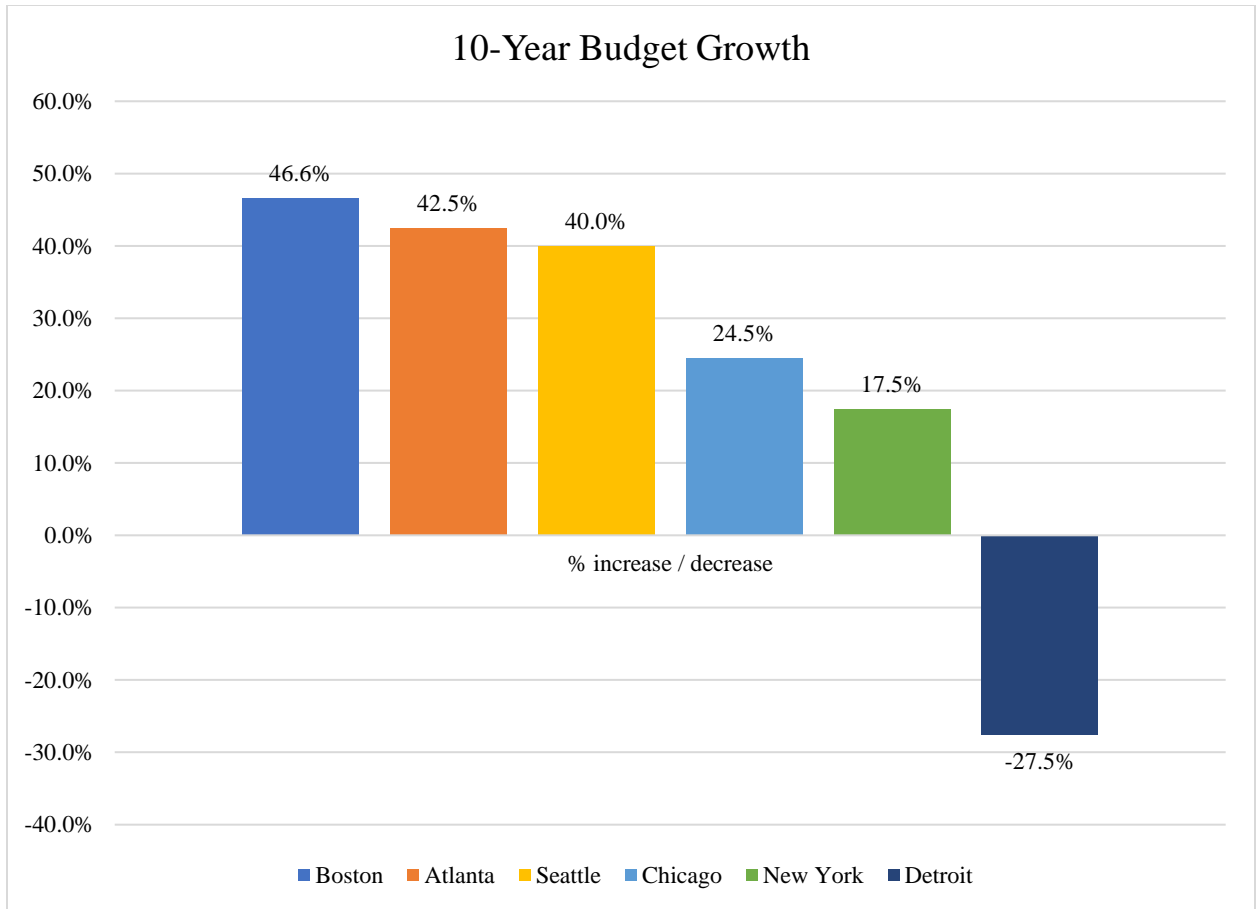
¹⁴ These reflect the budget for the "Police Department" line item. *Compare* City of Chicago, *2013 Budget Recommendations*, 154 (2012),

https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/obm/supp_info/2013%20Budget/2013BUDGETRECFINAL.pdf (Chicago's police spending FY11), with City of Chicago, *2021 Budget Ordinance*, 142 (2020), https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/obm/supp_info/2021Budget/BUDGET%20ORDINANCE%202021%20BUDGET.pdf (Chicago's adopted police budget for FY21).

¹⁵ These reflect the budget allocations to the "Police Department" line item. *Compare* Seattle, Finance Department, *2013 Adopted and 2014 Endorsed Budget*, 335 (2012),

<https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/FinanceDepartment/13adoptedbudget/333Police.pdf> (Seattle's FY11 police spending), with Seattle, Finance Department, *City of Seattle, Washington 2021 Adopted Budget*, 372 (2020), <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/FinanceDepartment/21adoptedbudget/2021%20adopted%20budget%20book.pdf> (Seattle's adopted police budget for FY21).

¹⁶ *Compare* City of Atlanta Finance Department, *Fiscal Year 2013 Adopted Budget*, 5-187 (2013), <https://www.atlantaga.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=9745>, with City of Atlanta Finance Department, *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget*, 353 (2020), <https://www.atlantaga.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=48185>.



The 46% budget increase over the past decade gives BPD a higher per-resident operating budget than similarly sized cities. BPD’s current budget of \$404 million,¹⁷ for a city with approximately 692,000 residents,¹⁸ amounts to approximately \$580 per resident. By comparison, Detroit’s \$328 million operating budget,¹⁹ for a city of 670,000,²⁰ amounts to approximately \$490 per resident.

¹⁷ Boston, *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 287.

¹⁸ The latest available population data is from 2019. U.S. Census Bureau, *Boston City, MA*, https://www.census.gov/search-results.html?q=boston+ma&page=1&stateGeo=none&searchtype=web&cssp=SERP&_charset_=UTF-8.

¹⁹ Detroit, *Four Year Financial Plan*, *supra* note 12, at C44.

²⁰ The latest available population data is from 2019. U.S. Census Bureau, *Detroit City, MI*, <https://www.census.gov/search-results.html?searchType=web&cssp=SERP&q=Detroit%20city,%20MI>.

Seattle, with a population of approximately 753,000,²¹ also allocates to its police department approximately \$100 less per resident than Boston does.

Moreover, analysis shows that other major cities have addressed the need for community engagement and police oversight differently than Boston. For example, Seattle cut its entire police budget by 12% (approximately \$50 million) to reduce the number of officers and to focus more on responding to violent crimes, as opposed to incidents related to homelessness, substance use, or mental health issues.²² Comparatively, Boston's FY21 reallocation of funds away from police to other programs was only 3% (approximately \$12 million) of BPD's overall police budget.²³ Additionally, Boston has only recently approved a civilian review board to oversee police at the behest of a special taskforce.²⁴ Although the civilian review board is still in development, it will be structured similarly to New York City's review board which has been criticized as ineffective, in part, because most of its disciplinary recommendations are ignored.²⁵ Other major cities have robust mechanisms for police oversight. For example, Chicago has an Office of Reform Management, a Bureau of Internal Affairs, and a Force Review Unit all within its police department, in addition to an external Police Board and Civilian Office of Police Accountability.²⁶ Seattle²⁷ and Atlanta²⁸ both have police accountability boards as well.

²¹ The latest available population data is from 2019. U.S. Census Bureau, *Seattle, WA*, <https://www.census.gov/search-results.html?searchType=web&cssp=SERP&q=Seattle%20city,%20WA>; Seattle 2021 Adopted Budget, *supra* note 15, at 242.

²² Seattle, Finance Department, *Seattle Police Department 2021 Proposed Budget*, 347-349 (2020), <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/FinanceDepartment/21proposedbudget/SPD.pdf>.

²³ Boston, *FY21 Adopted Budget*, *supra* note 9.

²⁴ Ally Jarmanning, *Boston City Council Approves New Office of Police Accountability*, WBUR (Dec. 16, 2020), <https://www.wbur.org/news/2020/12/16/boston-police-oversight-office-approved>.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ Chicago, *2021 Budget Ordinance*, *supra* note 14, at 140, 144, 146-147, 184.

²⁷ Seattle, *2021 Adopted Budget*, *supra* note 15, at 305.

²⁸ Atlanta, *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget*, *supra* note 16, at 397.

II. DESPITE FINANCIAL GROWTH, THE BOSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT'S FISCAL DECISIONS DO NOT BENEFIT INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON POLICE OVERSIGHT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

1. Boston Police 10-Year Allocation Trends

Despite a \$128 million increase²⁹ in funding over the last decade, the portions of the BPD budget that are dedicated to improvements in police-community relations or police training and oversight were either cut or only marginally increased over that time.

BPD is divided into eight bureaus, each of which is responsible for specific BPD functions, and all of which are managed by the Officer of the Commissioner.³⁰ Each bureau has a separate budget line item, allowing for review of areas which BPD is prioritizing for growth. For example, the Bureau of Professional Standards, which is tasked, in part, with addressing police misconduct, has seen its budget cut by over 40% since FY11 (from approximately \$7 million to about \$4 million).³¹ The budget for the Bureau of Professional Development, which is tasked with officer training, has been cut by 62% in the last year alone – and 17% (\$5 million) over the past 10 years. The Bureau of Community Engagement, which is tasked with building trust and relationships with residents and directing community policing, was created and funded within the last few years. Over the life of that bureau, it has never represented more than 1.5% of the total BPD Budget, approximately \$5 million.³²

Meanwhile, over 60% of the over \$128 million 10-year growth in the BPD budget has been directed to the Bureau of Field Services, which is responsible for traditional police

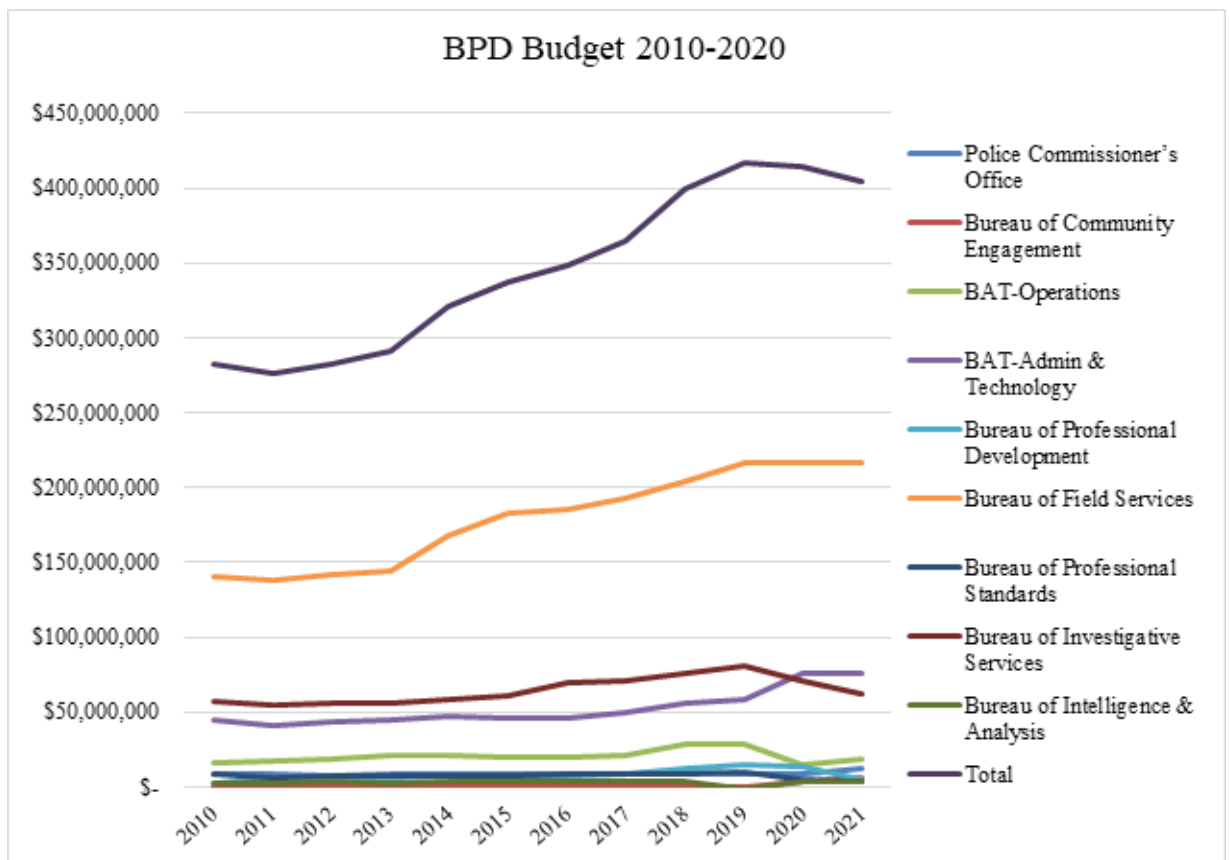
²⁹ Compare Boston, *Fiscal Year 2013 Operating Budget*, supra note 9, at 273 (BPD's FY11 spending), with Boston, *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget*, supra note 9, at 325 (BPD's FY21 adopted budget).

³⁰ Boston Police News, *Inside the BPD: Bureaus*, <https://bpdnews.com/bureaus>.

³¹ Compare Boston, *Fiscal Year 2013 Operating Budget*, supra note 9, at 273 (BPD's FY11 spending on this bureau), with Boston, *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget*, supra note 9, at 325 (BPD's FY21 adopted budget).

³² Boston, *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget*, supra note 9, at 325

functions such as the deployment of officers and tactical team operations. That bureau saw a 56% increase (almost \$78 million) in its budget over the past 10 years.³³ Additionally, the Commissioner’s Office, which is the administrative head of BPD, and the Bureau of Administration and Technology (BAT)³⁴, which assists with management procurement, both saw over 50% growth in their respective budgets over the last 10 years.³⁵ These ten-year budget trends suggest a prioritization on traditional bureaucracy and policing tactics coupled with a disinterest in police oversight and community-oriented programs.



³³ *Id.*

³⁴ BAT- Operations, described below, is a subdivision of BAT with a separate budget line item.

³⁵ Compare Boston, *Fiscal Year 13 Adopted Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 273 (BPD’s FY11 spending on this bureau), with Boston, *Fiscal Year 21 Adopted Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 325 (BPD’s FY21 adopted budget on this bureau).

2. FY20-FY21 Allocations

A close look at BPD's internal allocation of funds between FY20 and FY21 demonstrates that, as predicted by the trends seen over the last 10 years, BPD continues to devalue its bureaus charged with police oversight and community engagement while funding bureaus engaged in traditional policing functions. For example, between FY20 and FY21, the following bureaus that support BPD's traditional policing activities experienced stability or growth in their budgets:³⁶

- The Bureau of Field Services, which includes the patrol division and “practical, tactical and selective enforcement operations,” increased by approximately \$250,000 and continues to account for the largest portion of the BPD budget, making up approximately 54% of the budget with a total budget of \$216.48 million.
- BAT, which directs police deployments, procures and maintains supplies such as vehicles and technology, maintains facilities, and collects fees, received an approximately \$4.1 million increase, bringing it to 4.7% of the BPD annual budget.
- The Police Commissioner's Office, which “is responsible for the management, planning, direction and control of the Department,” increased its budget by \$3.8 million making it 3.1% of the total BPD budget for FY21.

At the same time, the following bureaus that focus on police oversight and community engagement saw decreases in their budget between FY20 and FY21:³⁷

- The Bureau of Professional Standards, which is “responsible for the administrative investigation of all police misconduct, including violations of a law” and for handling “corruption prevention programs within the City of Boston as well as proactive and

³⁶ Boston, *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 325.

³⁷ *Id.*

reactive investigation” has been cut by approximately \$1.3 million, reducing its portion of the budget to approximately 1% of the total FY21 budget.

- The Bureau of Professional Development, which is responsible for training of police officers, is experiencing an \$8.4 million decrease bringing it to 1.27% of the BPD budget for FY21.
- The Bureau of Investigative Services will still account for 15.3% of the overall budget, but is also being cut by over \$9.6 million. This Bureau oversees critical investigative units, including the civil rights and domestic violence units.

Although the relatively new Bureau of Community Engagement, which “oversees a citywide effort to further strengthen community policing and focuses on ways to build relationships and trust between law enforcement and residents,” did receive a \$2.1 million increase for FY21, it represents only 1.5% of BPD’s overall budget.³⁸

3. External Funds

As the City has increased its financial support for BPD, important external funding has decreased, including resources from state and federal grants. Since FY10, BPD’s external funding decreased from approximately \$16.3 million (or just under 6% of the total budget) in FY10³⁹ to less than \$10 million (or just over 2% of the budget) in FY21.⁴⁰ Among the projects that were supported by grants in FY10, but are no longer funded are:⁴¹

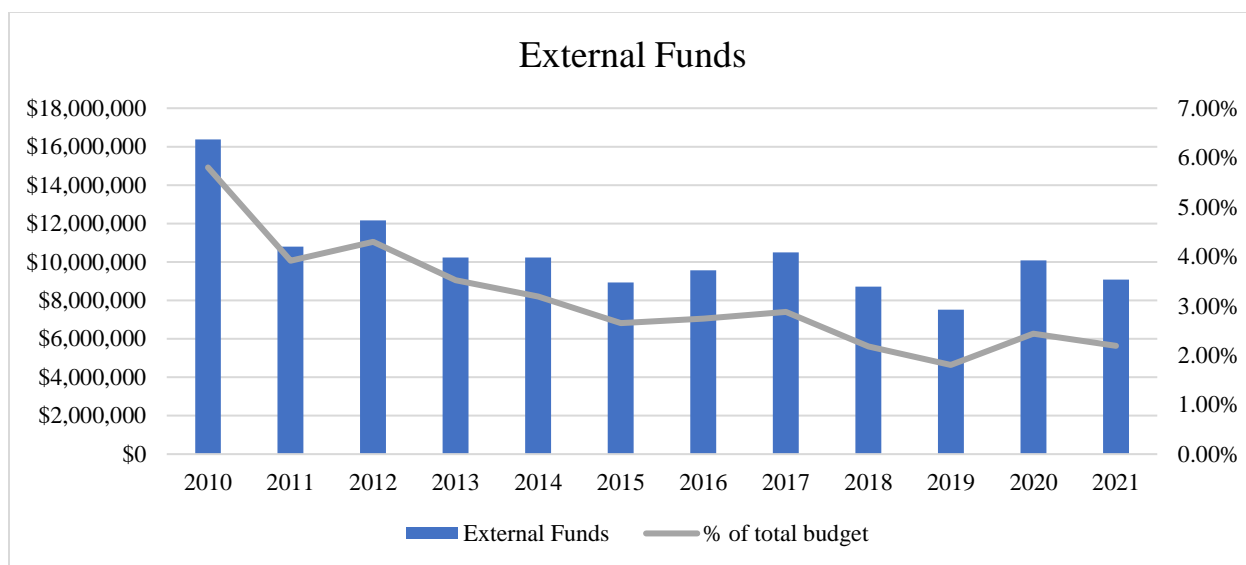
³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ Boston, *Fiscal Year 2013 Operating Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 274.

⁴⁰ Boston, *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 326.

⁴¹ Compare Boston, *Fiscal Year 2013 Operating Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 273-274 (listing BPD’s FY11 externally funded programs), with Boston *Fiscal Year 2021 Adopted Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 325-326 (listing BPD’s FY21 projects projected to have external funding).

- Boston Multicultural Advocacy Support, which provided support to victims of domestic violence;⁴²
- Boston Reentry Initiative, which funded support services for ex-offenders rejoining the community from incarceration;⁴³
- Smart Policing program, which implemented place-based initiatives through data;⁴⁴ and
- Community Based Violence Prevention, which focused on youth homicides in Mattapan.⁴⁵



The amount of funding BPD derives from external sources appears to be a lower percent of the total budget compared to the other police budgets examined for this report. For example, as much as 8% of the New York City Police Department budget comes from external sources,⁴⁶ and

⁴² Boston, *Fiscal Year 2013 Operating Budget*, *supra* note 9, at 290.

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 295.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 291.

⁴⁶ Citizen’s Budget Commission, *Seven Facts About the NYPD Budget*, (June 12, 2020), <https://cbcny.org/research/seven-facts-about-nypd-budget>.

Chicago generates about 4.5% of its police budget from external sources.⁴⁷ While external funding does not represent a large portion of the overall budget, it could be a critical resource to deepen and expand community-oriented programming. This decrease in external funds received by BPD could be a result of BPD not seeking or applying for grants or BPD applying for but not receiving the grants. Regardless of the reason, other major cities appear to be more successful in their efforts. In addition to reallocating funds within BPS to prioritize community-based efforts, BPD should be seeking external funding for community engagement and other programming to meet community needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A comprehensive review of the BPD budget over the past 10 years confirms that BPD's funding is not prioritizing community engagement and police oversight, but rather favoring traditional policing tactics. Given this, the City of Boston should:

- a) **Reallocate funding away from traditional police activities and towards BPD divisions charged with improving community policing, ensuring oversight, and enhancing accountability.** Currently, these bureaus are seeing fewer dollars year after year as money continues to be diverted into traditional policing. Directing more funds and resources to these bureaus would reflect a shift in police values and practices in sync with public demands, especially in light of the murders of Terrence Coleman, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd.
- b) **Seek external funding that could be used to further support BPD bureaus charged with improving community engagement and police accountability.** External funds can help support the community without the City needing to increase BPD's already high

⁴⁷ The Civic Federation, *What is the Chicago Police Department Budget?* (June 23, 2020), <https://www.civicfed.org/civic-federation/blog/what-chicago-police-department-budget>.

budget. BPD currently falls behind other major cities in the percent of revenue attributed to external sources, suggesting this is an untapped resource for supporting community engagement and police oversight.

- c) **Strengthen existing oversight mechanisms such as the civilian review board and add additional mechanisms such as new oversight units for specialized functions and teams.** Massachusetts has recently passed a law to institute a statewide police review board as well as new officer training requirements.⁴⁸ Boston should strive to meet and exceed those standards without state intervention. To do that, the City must have a civilian review board that has the tools to engage in meaningful investigation, including access to records and personnel as well as the ability to ensure accountability and to institute reforms.

CONCLUSION

Since 2010, the BPD budget has seen a higher percentage of growth than other major cities. Yet, the portions of the budget dedicated to programs that enhance community relations and ensure accountability have not proportionately increased – and often have decreased. The recent reallocation of \$12 million to community programs is not enough to address the profound disparities in resource allocations within BPD. Moreover, BPD still has over \$404 million at its disposal, and this money has been deployed in a way demonstrating disinterest in community engagement, accountability, and oversight. The recommendations set forth above would start to reverse these trends and signal a much needed cultural shift in the way BPD views its operations and functions vis-à-vis the communities it serves.

⁴⁸ MA. Sess. Law Ch. 253, *Police Reform Act*, (2020), <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2020/Chapter253>.