



TO: Senate

FROM: Senator Wright and Senator Fournier

SUBJECT: Question regarding Montreal Police Presence on Campus Affecting McGill's Academic Activity

MEETING DATE: November 13, 2024

DOCUMENT #: D24-20

PREAMBLE: Throughout the past few months, the Montreal Police (SPVM) has made several appearances on campus.

Despite not being involved in demonstrations, occupations, vandalism or any illegal activity on campus, several students have shared with student senators that they have been directly affected by police activities. In the summer of 2024, a student conducting research in the McConnell Engineering Building was harmed by the SPVM's use of tear gas. At the time of the James Administration Building occupation, this student, unaware of the events unfolding outside, was working with the window open. When the SPVM released tear gas, the student was directly exposed to its harmful effects, causing disruptions to both their work and their health. Two additional incidents occurred on October 7th, 2024, when the SPVM advanced towards Avenue Des Pins. One student, exiting the McGill Athletics Center on their way home, was stopped by the police, who then proceeded to deploy tear gas near their feet. Another student, walking toward the gym, was struck by the police, forcefully pushed into the crowd of protesters, and tear-gassed.

Multiple emails from McGill Communications and Emergency Notifications have illustrated that the University and the SPVM maintain a proximal relationship and communicate frequently. On May 3rd, 2024, an email from McGill Communications stated, "we are grateful for their [SPVM's] expertise and continue to collaborate closely with them." A subsequent email sent on June 7th, 2024, after the James Administration occupation, thanked the police for "their expertise in handling the situation." More recently, on October 7th, 2024, multiple emergency notifications were issued stating that "McGill security is working closely with the Montreal police," and another retroactively thanking both McGill Security and Montreal Police for maintaining campus safety.

While McGill is not directly accountable for the actions of the Montreal Police, the University's proximal relationship and frequent communications with the SPVM allude to a capacity to inform and influence police activity on campus. In light of the aforementioned student experiences—with many more presumably not disclosed—it appears that there have yet to be adequate protocols implemented to protect students on or near campus who are not involved in activities of disruption.

Additionally, it is essential to recognize the University's recent efforts regarding Emergency Response Notifications. However, these alerts are often released too late, after situations have already escalated, leaving many without timely updates. Moreover, they mainly address issues on the lower campus and neglect to highlight police presence near other McGill buildings, such as the McGill Gym. Additionally, the emails frequently highlight when the police are near, as well as the areas to avoid, but omit the potential dangers students might face.

Central to the University's mission of advancing "learning and the creation [...] of knowledge, by offering the best possible education," it is concerning—especially in light of McGill's association with the SPVM—that there is no apparent protocol in place to discourage the police from using harmful and disruptive tools while students are actively engaged in academic and personal activities across campus.

Finally, as previously cited, the University has consistently recognized the SPVM's expertise while omitting to acknowledge the students who have been harmed and affected by police activities. This dismissal of student experience may leave individuals feeling marginalized and alienated within their own campus community.

QUESTION:

1. In the instance of future SPVM presence and use of disruptive tools such as tear gas and physical force, how will McGill ensure the safety of students on campus who are in or near buildings they are permitted to access and who are not directly involved in any illegal activities or disruptions, instead present for legitimate personal or academic reasons?
2. What message would McGill like to convey to the students who have been harmed by the SPVM's tools while engaging in regular campus and academic activities around McGill buildings at the time of police interventions?

**Please refer to the [Guidelines for the Review of Questions and Motions by the Senate Steering Committee](#) for more information on this process.*

The following response was provided by Professor Angela Campbell, Interim Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning), and Professor Fabrice Labeau, Vice-President (Administration and Finance).

Thank you for your questions, Senators Wright and Fournier. We know that when an on-campus incident escalates to the point where police intervention is needed, this is likely to be upsetting and unsettling for many members of our community. That's one reason that the decision to request police intervention is always a last resort – undertaken only when illegal activities threaten the safety of our community or our campus, or make it impossible for university activities to continue.

It is altogether normal, however, that universities maintain open communication lines with local police. This is doubly true in the context of the past year or so, which has seen large groups with opposing views confronting each other on and near our campuses, as well as illegal activities including trespassing, the unlawful obstruction of classes and other university operations, the destruction of property, and even occasional violence from protestors. Universities have a responsibility to keep their communities safe, and to ensure their activities can continue. But our strengths are in teaching and research – not law enforcement or riot control – and we have seen some incidents that go well beyond what universities are equipped to manage on their own. Therefore, when the risk to the integrity of persons, property, or university activities is elevated, McGill and other universities work with police to protect their communities. And when police choose to intervene, universities do not and cannot influence their tactical decisions – nor would we have the expertise to do so.

Where an emergency police intervention occurs, as on October 7th, 2024, the University always tries to issue prompt messages to alert our community and direct McGillians away from certain areas. On October 7th, several such alerts were issued, though the rapidly shifting nature of the situation – and swift and unpredictable movement of protest groups on and near the Downtown Campus – made real-time messaging extremely difficult.

This being said, McGill has built up a wide range of communication tools to help keep you safe in an emergency. You can sign up for text message alerts through Minerva, receive desktop pop-ups on your personal laptop, or receive push notifications through the McGill App. We also send alert messages directly to your McGill email address (no sign-up required). To subscribe or to learn more about McGill's emergency notification system, visit: www.mcgill.ca/campussafety/emergency-management-preparedness/safety-info-tips-and-resources/emergency-notification-systems

Based on the results of our last bi-annual emergency notification system test, we have approximately 6900 subscribers receiving text alerts, 11600 devices that receive desktop pop-ups, and about 3400 McGill members who received the push notification on the app. Our next bi-annual system test is on November 14th, 2024.

As well, we urge anyone who needs support to reach out to the following resources: [Wellness Hub](#) (for students), [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) (for faculty and staff), [Office for Mediation and Reporting](#) (for all: for inquiries or to report incidents of sexual violence, harassment, and/or discrimination).