

African American Roundtable: ‘This is pathetic’: African American Roundtable rips City of Milwaukee leadership for 2023 budget, continues fight for participatory budgeting

Posted on Wednesday, Nov 23, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Milwaukee, WI (November 23, 2022) —Milwaukee’s 2023 budget was finalized yesterday, and the African American Roundtable (AART) ripped city leadership for a “status quo” budget that funds police at the expense of every other city department, as well as at the expense of the people of Milwaukee. Milwaukee police received a \$20 million increase.

For the fourth year in a row, AART’s [LiberateMKE campaign](#), along with allied partners and residents, have continued to say “no more or less money to police.” This year 54 testifiers—an estimated 80% of people who spoke—asked for funding in housing, mental health, library services, and city workers’ paychecks during public hearings.

“It is evident that police and their pensions are bankrupting Milwaukee, and that’s not being talked about enough,” said Devin Anderson, membership and coalition manager of AART. “Time and time again, residents have outlined the type of city they want to live and thrive in, including the city services they want invested in, and Milwaukee’s mayor will not listen. It’s unacceptable.”

“This is pathetic and a poor excuse for a city budget,” said Markasa Tucker-Harris,

executive director of AART. “The Common Council did its job and acted on the stories and testimonies of residents demanding funding for the fire department and libraries, but there is much more that the city could invest in to create the communities we deserve.”

Mayor Cavalier Johnson has continued to say that Milwaukee’s financial problems mean less services for residents, but he has failed to mention the [pension report](#) AART released last year with sensible solutions. According to a [Wisconsin Policy Forum report](#), “The city’s 2,325 active police and firefighters accounted for 80.2% of the cost of the city’s share of the overall pension contribution, even though they make up only 42.8% of the city’s workforce.” It is safe to assume that police are the majority of that fund since they account for over 1,650 of those positions.

Also, police have not been impacted by shrinking government like other departments. [Since 2000](#), the City of Milwaukee has eliminated 1,023 positions, or 12.4% of its workforce. However, the police department has had a 5% decrease. This means other departments have had to take deeper cuts. For example, the Department of Public Works has shrunk from 1,739 positions in 2000 to 1,453 in 2022, a 16.4% decrease or reduction of 286 positions. This equates to a reduction in services like pothole repair, snow plowing, and trash removal.

Throughout this budget process, there were anywhere from three to four empty aldermanic district seats, which meant that over 25% of Milwaukee residents—particularly Black residents who are the majority in Districts 1, 2, and 9—had no say during this budget cycle. All residents deserve decision-making power over these public funds, regardless of zip code.

Again, it is clear to AART, its partners and the community members they represent that Milwaukee’s current budget process does not work for all of its residents. It has also become increasingly clear that equity cannot be established through a lopsided budget process. AART believes that nothing is more pressing than Milwaukee’s need to adopt a participatory budgeting process to give aldermanic districts the abilities to propose, vote on, and implement local budgeting decisions.

In 2023, AART will continue its fight for a budget that adequately funds neighborhoods, housing, mental health services and supports participatory budgeting. Milwaukee deserves it.