From: Max
To: Public Comments
Subject: 7/21 Commission Meeting: Halt Reopening & Defund Sheriff"s Office
Date: Monday, July 20, 2020 4:38:10 PM

Buncombe County Commissioners,

My name is Max McDonald and I am a resident of Asheville, NC. I am writing to express my disappointment in the County's response to the two pandemics in our state: COVID-19 and racism. Both, as acknowledged by the County Health Board, are public health crises; moreover, they are intrinsically related due to the systemic disenfranchisement of our Black, Brown, and Indigenous neighbors.

We are **demanding** that you amend the budget to defund the County Sheriff's Office and Detention Center by at least 50% and reinvest those funds into an appropriate pandemic response. This plan must include an end to reopening; COVID cases continue to rise, in part due to the influx of tourists from around the country and many locals being forced to return to work in unsafe environments. As an employee in downtown Asheville, it is incredibly unsettling to see hotels operating in full capacity, the resulting crowds of tourists, and the disregard for social distancing guidelines.

Only essential businesses should be open with a requirement that they provide all workers with protective gear and that the mask policy is upheld. All schools must choose Plan C and refuse to return to in-person learning; any deaths or severe illness as a result of reopening schools is **unacceptable**. Free testing and masks must be available and accessible for all, and there must be increased pay and support for frontline medical and emergency workers. The County must shut down all leisure travel and abolish the TDA. Hotels must be opened for the unhoused community to prioritize their health and wellbeing.

In addition, the County sheriff must halt enforcing evictions during the COVID pandemic. Forcing people out into the streets will do nothing but harm the local community. Durham County has already made this commitment, and Buncombe must as well.

Lastly, the pandemic response **must** direct funds towards communities most at risk, particularly immigrant, Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities. Resources **must** be committed to provide affordable housing, land provisions, mental health services, rent subsidies and eviction diversion, free public transportation, and restorative justice services for all.

Max McDonald