

July 3, 2020

Via email only

Mayor John Tory mayor_tory@toronto.ca
Beaches-East York Councillor Brad Bradford Councillor_Bradford@toronto.ca
Toronto Police Services Board board@tpsb.ca

Subject: Take action on the racist attack in east Toronto

Dear Mayor John Tory, Councillor Brad Bradford and the Toronto Police Services Board,

I am writing to express my concern about the experience of racism and violence experienced by a member of United Steelworkers Local 1998, Mark Austin. Mark is a Black man, a trade unionist, a father, a community member of Beaches-East York and works at the University of Toronto.

On the morning of June 25, he and his partner Candace Zinkweg were brutally assaulted by two white men, while walking their dog at Dentonia Park, near Victoria Park Avenue and Danforth Avenue.

Mark was violently assaulted and repeatedly subjected to racist abuse. Candace had her cell phone stolen, was knocked to the ground and then kicked in the head by the two men. She lost consciousness, suffered a serious concussion and was transported by ambulance to the hospital when EMS finally arrived.

Despite an early call to 911, the police and EMS were both slow to arrive on the scene. When the police did arrive, none of the four officers sought out a statement from the victim and failed to interview any witnesses at the park, despite a number of families who saw the sequence of events unfold.

When questioned about why they had not laid charges on the assailants, the police responded that it was a “he said, she said” scenario. This in effect, criminalizes Mark and Candace for their own assaults and the racism that Mark endured. Candace was diagnosed with a concussion at the hospital and is still experiencing serious side effects from the blows to the head.

During the attack, the one man repeatedly made death threats against Mark, saying he would shoot him the next time he saw him. Mark has reported this to the police, with still no action being taken.

The assailants live in the same building as Mark and Candace, and they have continued their threats with impunity because the police have taken no action.

I am writing on behalf of the United Steelworkers union, where Mark proudly serves as the Recording Secretary of Local 1998 at the University of Toronto, to call for immediate action to:

1. Investigate this case and press charges against the assailants.
2. Recognize the racial profiling that happened in this incident wherein Mark was assumed equally guilty as the attacker.
3. Develop, with input from community, a robust and public plan for addressing racism within the Toronto Police Service and the prevalence of racism around the city. Efforts to date have fallen far short.

At a time where there is increased scrutiny on police forces across North America and on systemic racism within government and society at large, it is urgently necessary that the Toronto Police Services Board take every measure possible to address the on-going racist treatment of Torontonians, particularly Black residents.

I am also calling on Toronto City Council to lead the way for the country in tackling racism within the city. We know this is not an isolated incident and we need leadership from government now. Inaction is emboldening racism and racist violence and doing nothing is tantamount to complicity.

Mark Austin and Candace Zinkweg have the full support of our union, which represents some 850,000 workers across North America. I would like to set up a meeting for the United Steelworkers union with the City of Toronto and the representatives of the TPS Board to hear from you on how this situation will not only be addressed now, but prevented in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marty Warren" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marty Warren
District 6 Director (Ontario and the Atlantic provinces)

CC: MPP Rima Berns-McGown, Beaches-East York RBerns-McGown-QP@ndp.on.ca
MP Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, Beaches-East York Nathaniel.Erskine-Smith@parl.gc.ca