

# Security firm touts self as police-budget solution

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A security guard working for G4S keeps watch at Nathan Phillips Square last winter. (Chris So / Toronto Star)

By [Betsy Powell](#) City Hall Bureau

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Tim Saunders has a solution to lowering escalating policing costs: allow private security guards to perform certain duties now carried out by highly trained and paid officers.

“It’s not about the displacement of front-line policing,” insists Saunders, chief business development officer with G4S, the world’s largest provider of security services.

“It can be an extraordinarily complementary strategy, putting highly trained resources in complex environments where they need to be, versus other areas.”

The role private security firms might potentially play in traditional public policing is drawing increasing interest as cash-strapped municipalities struggle to pay their rising law enforcement tabs, at a time of dropping crime rates.

On Thursday, [Toronto Police budget planners](#) will tell the civilian oversight board the force’s funding for 2016 must rise, once again, to cover the most recent collective-agreement payroll increase.

While Mayor John Tory and board chair Andy Pringle have talked about looking for efficiencies in policing, Saunders’ cost-cutting message, so far, appears to have fallen on deaf ears at city hall, where there is no stomach for blowback from the powerful and change-resistant police union.

Saunders is diplomatic and says he and the lobbyists hired by G4S have had some “very interesting and productive conversations with both provincial and municipal levels.”

He also stresses it takes time to establish relationships, while acknowledging the difficulty of pushing an expanded role for private security. “As soon as you have the conversation, it seems to create this defensive stance, and that’s not what it’s about from my perspective,” he says.

It’s not only the people selling security services who believe that outsourcing police work may be inevitable.

“There is the potential for private security to play an important role in community safety and addressing issues of crime and disorder,” says *The Use of Private Security in Policing*, a new report prepared for Public Safety Canada.

But the report also highlights the difficult road ahead. It cites interviews with numerous unnamed justice and police officials, who flag legal, structural and policy factors “that don’t support the use of private security for police functions.” The officials also warn of “huge gaps” in regulation and oversight.

Saunders, based in G4S’s Mississauga office, concedes there may be legislative and other hurdles to overcome, but says there are also numerous jurisdictions, including within Canada, where the police are working in “innovative” partnerships with private security.

For instance, G4S is working with police forces in the United Kingdom, providing operational and organizational support that is introduced gradually.

“We’ll take over the management of uniforms, run it more efficiently and create some synergies, then all of a sudden it grows because you earn the right to move forward into more complex and strategic areas.”

A 2015 report prepared by the not-for-profit, non-partisan Montreal Economic Institute also endorsed the idea of subcontracting out police work, calling it “a viable solution for curbing constantly rising police spending.”

Researchers found security guards could perform 193 of 215 activities carried out by police, leaving armed officers with the highly demanding and potentially dangerous assignments.

For example, an eight-and-a-half-hour operation to nab impaired drivers with eight officers — each with a total compensation of about \$140,000 annually — would cost \$6,140, compared to \$2,330 if two officers and six security agents staffed the roadblock.

“The majority of the tasks involved . . . are auxiliary duties, like installing signage, administering physical co-ordination tests, administering breathalyzer tests, co-ordinating blood and urine test, as well as filling out reports,” the report says.

“The only duties that fall under the essential functions of police officers are the impounding of vehicles for major infractions and the arrest of drivers.”