

Mayor Ted Wheeler  
Commissioner Amanda Fritz  
Commissioner Dan Ryan  
Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty  
Commissioner Chloe Eudaly

October, 2020

Dear esteemed members of the Portland City Council,

We, the neighbors undersigned below, demand significant change in the structure and operations of the Portland Police Bureau (PPB).

The Bureau's iterations over the years have consistently evidenced an unrelenting preference to defend and serve itself and its own interests rather than those of Portland's citizen communities. The current Bureau has used the following tactics in demonstration of this proclivity:

- The Bureau has used tear gas and other chemical weapons — ones that would be illegal during times of war — on peaceful Portland citizens protesting racial injustice. Beyond the immediate harmful effect of these chemicals, they have been shown to have adverse, long-term health impacts on all life forms, human, animal, vegetable. In addition, some peaceful protestors have had to seek hospital medical services as a result of Bureau actions.
- The Bureau has supportively aided incursions by various violent groups instead of defending our city from their invasion. The Bureau has provided escort into and out of Portland for white supremacist vigilante caravans brandishing guns, pepper spray, paint balls, and mace, while simultaneously allowing Portland citizens to be threatened and assaulted.
- The Bureau has failed to respond to incidents in a timely fashion. In one Concordia incident, a family was forced to wait 18 hours before a response was made after their home having been riddled with bullets. Despite the time passed since then, the Bureau has neither proved nor disproved whether the shooters were white militants. The lengthy delay in response to a serious issue is by itself concerning; that this should happen to a Black family is particularly alarming.

- Black and brown residents and visitors to Concordia as well as across the city have been subjected to racial profiling by the Bureau for decades. Lately the Bureau, as well as neighboring communities' law enforcement organizations, have visibly demonstrated more active levels of racism. All of these behaviors are unacceptable examples of systemic racism that we refuse to tolerate any longer.
- The Bureau has neither made public acknowledgement of its own dysfunction, nor shown any willingness either to respond to community demands or to work towards self-improvement.

These actions by the Bureau beg the question: what does it mean to protect and serve a community? Going forward, how can Portland best ensure a Bureau structure and culture that will provide these necessary functions to all our citizens?

The Mayor has stated that he feels that he cannot fire police officers who are problematic. In order to ensure that the Mayor has the authority to break with police officers who may be in violation of laws, regulations, or professional rules of conduct, we would like to see the City consider dissolving the current contracts and negotiating new contracts that would allow the Mayor to fire any individual who violates the rules. We understand that not all police officers are inherently racists; our intent is to allow for an easier and ultimately less costly path to fire individuals who cannot uphold the values and protection of our community. Our community wants a stricter screening process in order to employ or continue to employ police officers who will serve and protect ALL of the community and residents regardless of economic background or color - not in just words, but in action.

However the change is accomplished, the Bureau's structure and functions must become a system that will guarantee all community members safety within our city. In doing so, the following issues must be addressed and satisfied:

- **First Amendment rights**

Our state and federal constitutions allow citizens to engage in peaceful protest without being met with violence. The Bureau has a duty to ensure this right.

- **Police brutality**

We insist on a Bureau that is focused on public safety, with peace officers and a culture of compassionate engagement with the public. This must necessarily include de-militarizing, de-weaponizing, and disarming most public safety professionals, except for a very small number to act as on-call specialists for severe weapons-involved

situations. There must be a rapid path for the removal of officers and/or employees of this or any Bureau, who have been found to have engaged in, condoned, or covered-up instances of police-inflicted brutality, whether physical or psychological. Removed officers should also suffer a commensurate loss in pension benefits, to ensure that there are financial incentives to engage in the cultivation of a culture of compassionate engagement.

● **Development of Bureau employee de-escalation skills**

Recent events have shown that, when engaged in crowd control, the Bureau's actions escalate rather than diffuse violence. This must change. An effective program to continually improve and practice de-escalation skills must be instituted for employees of any Bureau involved in providing public safety services and functions.

● **Citywide ban on chemical weapons**

An outright ban within city limits is needed regarding the purchase, possession or use of tear gas and other chemical weapons by anyone, whether Bureau officers or not.

● **Use of the portion of the City budget dedicated to public safety**

Restructure and resize the Bureau by assigning some or all current Bureau functions better handled by other agencies to other Bureaus and service partners, including the County, Metro, the State, and nonprofit partners to address specific categories of interventions, including, but not limited to, mental health, houselessness, addiction, and domestic violence. Additionally, the city must fund activities that provide protection and social safety nets to all citizens, and particularly to Black and brown residents, as well as others who have been similarly affected.

It is no secret that Oregon was founded upon racist intentions: exclusionary laws were enacted to discourage Blacks from living here or owning property.

It is urgent that we break irrevocably from our recent and historic past. It was only in 2002 that the last vestiges of racist language was removed from the Oregon Constitution. That change, thankfully supported by the majority of voters, was still opposed by 30%.

The Concordia neighborhood was a target of active redline segregation policies and practices that concentrated and limited Portland's Black population in the 20th Century. This history calls upon us to be particularly cognizant of the systematic oppression of our neighbors.

The time to eliminate any and all manifestations of racism in our city is now. It is indisputable that Black and brown lives matter. Our responsibility as a neighborhood — and as a city — is to hold that truth high. And it must energize us to join in the battle to end racism nationwide by undoing the harm committed here in Portland for more than a century.

Signed,

Concordia Neighbors, including those who have participated in the letter writing process