



421 SW 6th Avenue Suite 500 · Portland, OR 97204
503.823.4433 · portlandoregon.gov/oehr/hrc

August 3, 2018

Honorable Mayor Ted Wheeler
Portland City Council Commissioners
City Hall, 1221 SW 4th Ave.
Portland, OR, 97204

Chief Danielle Outlaw
Portland Police Bureau
1111 S.W. 2nd Avenue
Portland, OR, 97204

Re: Disparate arrests of houseless community members, sweeps, inadequate access to basic hygiene

Dear Mayor Wheeler, Commissioners Eudaly, Fish, Fritz, and Saltzman, and Chief Outlaw,

The City of Portland Human Rights Commission strongly encourages the City to immediately and robustly investigate the increasing criminalization of houselessness. The Commission respectfully asks Mayor Wheeler and Chief Outlaw in particular to take the crucial steps necessary to protect our community members who are houseless from future “arbitrary arrest” and all forms of undignified, negligent, and inhumane treatment by City officials and employees.

Guided by the principles set forth in the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the HRC believes PPB’s actions are in direct conflict with the Declaration’s following Articles:

Article 2. Affirms, *Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as...property...;*

Article 5. Affirms, *No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;*

Article 9. Affirms, *No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile; and,*

Portland Human Rights Commission
Daniel Franco-Nuñez, Michele Wilson, Rhodes Perry, Brandie Dieterle DelaHoz,
Josue Ramirez, Sonia Marie Leikam, Adam Murray Millon, Jon Shadel, Chris Wallace Caldwell

Article 25. Affirms, *Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

The disparate arrests of our community members who are houseless by Portland Police are alarming – these members represent 3% of the City’s population but account for 52% of arrests. Chief Outlaw spoke to the Human Rights Commission during our March 17th, 2018 meeting. She was asked to respond to data concerning PPB’s increasing criminalization of houselessness. Chief Outlaw stated that while the issue is complicated, PPB is committed to working with our community members who are houseless to ensure that they receive appropriate services. She also remarked that she does not view houselessness as a PPB issue but instead as a Public Health issue. At the time, HRC felt that PPB was moving in the right direction. However, our community members who are houseless remain one of the most vulnerable and criminalized populations in Portland. The conditions are dire and unacceptable.

The Human Rights Commission also decries several statements made by the Portland Police Association’s President Daryl Turner on Monday, July 16th, 2018. Mr. Turner’s message was discriminatory and divisive, and he expressed clear contempt for members of our community who are houseless. He said:

“Our City has become a cesspool. Livability that once made Portland a unique and vibrant city is now replaced with human feces in businesses (sic) doorways, in our parks, and on our streets. Aggressive panhandlers block the sidewalks, storefronts, and landmarks like Pioneer Square, discouraging people from enjoying our City. Garbage-filled RVs and vehicles are strewn throughout our neighborhoods. Used needles, drug paraphernalia, and trash are common sights lining the streets and sidewalks of the downtown core area, under our bridges, and freeway overpasses. That’s not what our families, business owners, and tourists deserve.”

Missing from this characterization of our City is any suggestion that Mr. Turner views members of our community who are houseless as a part of Portland, or deserving better (like “tourists”). Instead his words *other* them, and clearly place them outside of our community. Statements like this dehumanize people and there are qualitative data demonstrating that dehumanization is almost always the first step in justifying violence against marginalized people.

Portland Human Rights Commission
Daniel Franco-Nuñez, Michele Wilson, Rhodes Perry, Brandie Dieterle DelaHoz,
Josue Ramirez, Sonia Marie Leikam, Adam Murray Millon, Jon Shadel, Chris Wallace Caldwell

Mr. Turner also stated:

“The rank and file of the Portland Police Bureau are working tirelessly to improve livability in our City, preserve public safety, and connect our vulnerable communities to social services. We are the first line resource on the streets serving the public—including the homeless—every day with care and professionalism.”

This contradicts several studies, personal narratives, and public testimony at HRC meetings from our community members. They consistently report being treated inhumanely by Portland Police. Raids and “sweeps,” for example, have been described as violent and violating – they permanently lose their belongings, are arrested, and are always met with contempt.

They also consistently and bravely share the horrific challenges they endure daily – challenges that many other Portland community members cannot imagine including walking miles to find a bathroom, inadequate access to hygiene (notably unsanitary and dangerous shower and laundry facilities), and severely limited access to feminine hygiene supplies.

Houselessness is not a reflection of a person’s flaws or failures; it must be disentangled from this myth and instead understood as a consequence of historic systems designed to create and to maintain advantages for certain people while simultaneously excluding others. Arbitrarily arresting our community members who are houseless sentences them to a lifetime of insecurity and disparity – they are guaranteed limited to no access to housing, food, hygiene, educational scholarships and grants, employment, credit, and healthcare. In sum it increases their vulnerability to illness, violence and death.

Inquiring about how PPB engages with our houseless community – as Mayor Wheeler did when he asked what role implicit bias or profiling plays – is legally and morally appropriate and the HRC commends the Mayor for his leadership and commitment to change. For the City to explore and fully realize sustainable ways to address the livability crisis we share, shaming and targeting our community members who are houseless must end.

The Human Rights Commission is committed to working with all stakeholders to create safe, healthy, accessible, and dynamic communities in our City. We are, however, gravely concerned about the extent to which Mr. Turner’s position is shared within PPB’s ranks. If you would like to discuss more we invite you to reach out to the Portland Human Rights Commission.

Sincerely,

The City of Portland Human Rights Commission

Portland Human Rights Commission
Daniel Franco-Nuñez, Michele Wilson, Rhodes Perry, Brandie Dieterle DelaHoz,
Josue Ramirez, Sonia Marie Leikam, Adam Murray Millon, Jon Shadel, Chris Wallace Caldwell