



CITY OF PORTLAND, OREGON



Bureau of Police
Ted Wheeler, Mayor
Charles Lovell, Chief of Police

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July 9, 2020

Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty
1221 SW 4th Avenue, Room 230
Portland, Oregon 97204

Dear Commissioner Hardesty:

Thank you for your letter dated July 1, 2020. I join you in hoping that the Portland Police Bureau continues to build and maintain strong community trust.

Recently, this city has experienced an unprecedented outpouring of welcomed calls for continued meaningful reform. We agree and hope more people will join with us to find peaceful resolutions to problems, improve community-based services for people in need, and work to create systems by which police can be dialed out of situations where others may be more effective in providing services.

As I said on the day I accepted this role, I will not be able to do this alone. I will continue to rely on community partners, you and other elected officials, other city bureaus and the entire community. We will need to come together to work on the ongoing reform of the methods and processes the Portland Police Bureau and the City uses to serve all people.

As you know, the Police Bureau is no stranger to reform and has worked tirelessly to make substantial changes over the years in response to community concerns about procedures and tactics. In addition, we have spent the last seven years in active dialogue with community and government interests to improve our policies, training and accountability. This has included: implementing significant changes to the way we train; use force; report and investigate use of force; and provide services to community members, particularly our most vulnerable, such as those experiencing mental health crises. We remain committed to continuing to evolve and seize opportunities for reform that have been discussed by our larger community.

Separate from the constructive voices, though, are individuals who have chosen to participate in nightly criminal activity near the Justice Center or other police-related facilities. While there may be peaceful protestors at these events, there are groups of people who participate in vandalism, arson, burglaries to businesses, thefts, assaults and other criminal activity that have required police response.

Our public servants have faced dangerous and deadly items that have been directed at them, including rocks, glass bottles, frozen water bottles, fireworks, mortars and other projectiles hurled from slingshot devices. Lasers have been used to temporarily blind and irritate officers' eyes. Many officers have been injured. Our police facilities have been barricaded and set on fire. We are fortunate no lives have been lost.

The use of police resources as well as the significant and sustained damage to city property is costing money that could be used to assist those business owners or community members suffering from COVID shutdowns or even to further the change our community is asking of us.

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PPB members have tried a number of ways to de-escalate the situation and will continue to do so. We have removed ourselves completely on some nights, but then witnessed an escalation by members of the crowd in order to get a response. In one instance, fires were lit and a security guard was assaulted. We have offered our Demonstration Liaison Officers to facilitate safe events. The group who is involved in nightly violence and destruction has expressed no interest in engaging in productive conversation despite repeated attempts.

In your letter, you discussed a few items. First, in regard to any charges, the District Attorney makes all decisions related to prosecution.

PPB will continue to abide by the Temporary Restraining Order to only use riot control munitions when there is a life safety risk. If there is a risk to someone's life, we have a moral responsibility and duty to respond. If tools are limited, we are left with fewer options, such as batons, which are more likely to cause injuries. We would prefer for those in the crowd to follow lawful orders so no one is arrested or subject to force or munitions. We are not using the sonic warning tone function of the LRAD as a riot control tool, but use it to provide audible direction via the sound truck to a large crowd, as is legally required when we are giving lawful orders.

I completely agree with the need that identification worn by officers be standardized and large enough to be legible. We are ordering these patches so that it is consistent on our uniforms.

Crowd management is extremely complex and Crowd Management Incident Commanders have received specialized training, with many being recognized nationally. Our leaders are well-trained and well-versed in responding to these complicated and dynamic situations. PPB is also currently participating in a National Police Foundation review of our crowd management tactics that was begun prior to these recent protests.

In the past when we have learned of protests, we planned our response to include talking with event coordinators, determining crowd size and of course, the safety and security of all involved. In these past protests, we determined whether our Demonstration Liaison Officers (who wear khaki pants and polo shirts) can engage those involved. We also make plans about whether our bike or patrol officers in regular uniforms should be present.

However, in these nightly protests since May 29, 2020, violence has ensued almost every night. Our Rapid Response Team members wear personal protective gear because they are sent to these situations that have been historically violent. Other officers who may respond are in regular uniforms, but wear helmets. They are often called from their regular assignments in precincts when things have already become violent and we need more resources. Once again, we have a moral and ethical responsibility to keep our employees safe.

We remain committed to continuing to respond to these events when there is a life safety risk. Our officers continue to do so while also ensuring we respond to emergency calls for service all over the city. They do so with professionalism and compassion. I am proud of the resiliency they have demonstrated night after night as they continue to provide exemplary service.

The other day I took a walk around downtown to listen to our business owners. I heard a lot of pain and sorrow from them about how the protests have affected them and it saddened me greatly that their

voices have not been heard. There are many voices that have been silenced or not been heard as well. This includes people who live or work downtown whose sense of safety and security as well as their overall livability has been affected. This includes victims who are not receiving police services or those who had to wait for hours because our officers were responding to this nightly criminal activity. There are voices from people who now fear coming downtown and the safety and security they once felt in our beautiful city.

I look forward to improving tools for accountability so that the community trusts the police. I look forward to an end to the violence and criminal activity that is drawing too much of the conversation away from the heart of the matter, and placing officers and this community at risk night after night.

The Portland Police Bureau is a progressive agency with a culture of change. We do not shy away from community input or new ways to try police work. We strive for excellence and will continue to do so. We have work to do and we are ready to listen and collaborate with our community to gain trust and build meaningful solutions.

Sincerely,



Charles Lovell, III
Chief of Police