

Portland Police Bureau Training Advisory Council

Date: January 12, 2022
From: Shawn Campbell
Chair, Training Advisory Council
To: Chief of Police Chuck Lovell
Subject: Investment in Restorative Justice

On behalf of the Portland Police Bureau's Training Advisory Council (TAC), I am writing to convey the importance of securing and investing the time and resources needed for the Portland Police Bureau to fully develop and implement a successful restorative justice program. Given the failures of the current criminal justice system, the evolution of new and alternative strategies is of great importance not just to the community, particularly marginalized communities, but also the officers who serve under you.

For too many of our fellow community members, interactions with the criminal justice system represent what amounts to a life sentence regardless of the crime committed. Fines and prison sentences represent only the beginning of challenges faced by those with a criminal record, with even the lowest of offenses likely to result in long-term challenges in gaining access to employment, housing, and educational opportunities. The lower someone's position on the economic ladder, the greater are the challenges to overcome. As a result of the more likely failure to overcome such challenges, the more likely somebody who has committed crimes is to be a repeat offender, not because of a fondness of living a life of crime, but rather because of experiences that say nothing else is available.

While this is most certainly a significant societal issue, it is an issue for Portland's police officers as well. Lacking options beyond the binary choice of either enforcing or not enforcing the law, officers are caught in the same cycle as the community members whom they regularly cite or take into custody. Officers often recognize when the consequences of the criminal justice system are not the best solution to an issue, but they have no other way of respecting the purpose of the law and the rights of victims. Again, as a result, officers are left with a sense of grinding away at an insurmountable problem, leading to despair and disillusionment, which in turn can lead to drops in morale, resignations, and/or concerning over reactive behaviors.

As defined by Lawrence William Sherman and Heather Strang in 2007¹, Restorative justice is a system of criminal justice which focuses on victim/survivor needs, and the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large. More specifically,

¹ Sherman & Strang. (2007). *Restorative Justice: The Evidence*. The Smith Institute.
https://www.iirp.edu/pdf/RJ_full_report.pdf

restorative justice consists of a series of processes that cultivate repairing harm and rebuilding relationships in the community. Restorative justice processes involve direct stakeholders in a specific offence collectively resolving how to deal with the aftermath of an offence and its implications for the future. Restorative justice exists along a spectrum, and its processes include, but are not limited to, restorative justice education/training, moral and cognitive learning, victim assistance, sentencing circles, victim-offender mediation, peacemaking circles, family group conferencing, memorializing, and community service.

Restorative justice practices and the results of those practices are evidence-based, and that evidence shows that an appropriately designed and executed restorative justice program substantially reduces repeat offending in both adults and youth, which in turn helps to promote community reintegration of the offenders. In other words, it lowers the magnitude of challenges faced by offenders who are engaged in the program, while increasing the proportion of offenses brought to a just resolution within the community. Restorative justice also reduces the cost of criminal justice by reducing costs associated with mass incarceration. It provides both victims and offenders with more satisfaction that justice has been done and it reduces crime victims' post-traumatic stress symptoms and the related costs. Restorative justice also reduces crime victims' desire for violent revenge against their offenders

While we understand that members of the Portland Police Bureau are currently looking into the development of a restorative justice model for Portland, without proper support and investment there is a significant risk that these early steps could become lost in the shuffle of tightening budget and resource priorities, personnel re-assignments, and the crushing glacial grip of bureaucratic processes. We encourage and support specific investments in:

- A comprehensive restorative justice referral system that meaningfully redirects offenders to interventions that specifically address harms and offer opportunities to make things right.
- Officer trainings on restorative justice principles, praxis, and interventions.
- Restorative justice capacity building within the PPB with internal disciplinary culture.

It is the view of the TAC that restorative justice represents a significant opportunity for meaningful change for both the communities of Portland and the police officers who serve them. We also believe work in this area must be made a priority by both the Portland Police Bureau and the City of Portland. Those in positions of leadership have both an opportunity to make our public safety system better and an obligation not to waste it. With the proper support and leadership, we fully believe significant and effective change is possible.

We are voicing our full support for the development and implementation of a restorative justice program in Portland. We are also preparing initial recommendations regarding police training in this area which will be completed later this year. We look forward to supporting the Portland Police Bureau in the important work of building back better. If you need to contact me, you can do so via email at ppbtac@gmail.com.

Yours Truly,
Shawn Campbell
TAC Chair

About the Training Advisory Council:

The TAC was created in 2012 as a police bureau advisory body by city resolution 36912. The TAC is a citizen's group with the mission of providing ongoing advice to the Chief of Police and the bureau's Training Division in order to continuously improve training standards, practices, and outcomes through the examination of training philosophy, content, delivery, tactics, policy, equipment, and facilities. The TAC is also tasked by Section 86 of the DOJ settlement agreement with the City of Portland to identify and report to the Chief of Police any patterns in the bureau's use of force. Website: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/61449>