

To: General Government, Consumer and Small Business Protection Committee

Re: Testimony supporting SB 747

From: Barbara Ross, [REDACTED]

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Barbara Ross and I am urging your support of SB 747. I speak as an individual, not representing any organization.

I believe that most Portland Police officers are responsible individuals who carry out their duties in a courteous and professional manner. We never hear about the tense situations that they handle with tact and skill. They deserve our gratitude.

That said, the few individuals who use excessive force in an unlawful or dangerous manner are not being held accountable. The system that exists allows the unions to challenge any discipline and ultimately take management decisions to arbitration.

Several cases illustrate the city's dilemma, as noted in testimony from Attorney Tom Steenson. Victims are shot by police, management tries to fire the officer, the arbitrator over rules the city's right to discipline, but the courts rule in favor of the victim's family. The city in addition to significant legal fees, has to pay large settlements. Faced with this threat, management is reluctant to discipline or fire the officers involved.

The problem is not limited to use of excessive force. Recently John Wyatt was accused of inappropriate advances to female officers and involvement in a road rage incident. The internal committee, after studying the results of the investigation, recommended that he be fired. They noted that in addition to his original actions he had lied repeatedly during the course of the investigation. Chief Reese did not take their advice to fire this officer. Instead he demoted him and after some public outcry, moved him into the his own office and put him in charge of " Special Projects"

In his explanation as reported in the press, Chief Reese implied that he did not fire Officer Wyatt because he feared that dismissal would not stand up to a union challenge and would be a lengthy and expensive fight. We cannot tolerate a structure that makes it impossible for management to appropriately discipline an officer who has violated the standards and ethics of the Portland Police Bureau.

These kinds of incidents undermine the public trust in the Portland Police Force. We know that law enforcement staff have very hard and stressful jobs. The publicity surrounding these tragic cases gives the public the impression that all officers feel free to do what ever they want without repercussions. They undermine the respect

that most Portland Police officers deserve as well as creating a lack of faith in the chief, the mayor and the city council's ability to control their public safety staff.