

TOM STEENSON
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Re: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 747

I write in support of Senate Bill 747.

I am a resident of the City of Portland and a practicing civil rights attorney.

During my 38 year career, I have represented countless victims of police misconduct involving Portland police officers who have used unlawful force. Some recent examples include the following cases I have brought on behalf of innocent victims against the City of Portland and some of its police officers:

Chasse v. City of Portland, et al. -- a case filed in 2007 involving the death of a mentally ill man, James Chasse, Jr., after he was beaten by Portland police officers (\$1,600,000 settlement with City).

Gwerder v. City of Portland, et al. -- a case filed in 2007 involving the death of a very intoxicated, despondent man, Raymond Gwerder, after a Portland police officer shot him in the back (\$500,000 settlement with City).

Campbell v. City of Portland, et al. -- a case filed in 2010 involving the death of a very despondent Aaron Campbell who, although unarmed, was shot in the back by a Portland police officer (\$1,200,000 settlement with City).

Despite the egregious uses of unlawful force in each of these cases, none of the police officers received discipline for their use of force. The only attempt to discipline any of these officers was related to the Campbell case. However, the decision by Portland's Police Chief and its Mayor to terminate the officer who shot and killed Aaron Campbell was overturned by an arbitrator and no discipline whatsoever was allowed by the arbitrator.

Based upon the above cases, as well as my observations of the Portland police over the past 38 years, it is my opinion that Portland is unable to discipline its officers who use unlawful force because of the flawed arbitration system which allows arbitrators to overturn a decision by Portland's Police Chiefs and its Mayors to do so. It is also my opinion that as a result of the arbitration system Portland is often reluctant to even try and discipline officers who use unlawful force out of fear of being rebuked by an arbitrator. The passage of Senate Bill 747 would change that.

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Senate Bill 747 would provide a critically important change in the law. Without the ability or wherewithal to even try to discipline Portland police officers who use unlawful force, particularly in situations resulting in the death of the victim, Portland is unable to effectively deter officers in Portland from using unlawful force. As a consequence, the tragic message that is sent to Portland police officers is that in terms of job consequences they can use unlawful force with impunity, which, as we in Portland well know, happens with alarming regularity.

For all of these reasons, I urge passage of Senate Bill 747.

Sincerely,

Tom Steenson