

**From:** [Tasha Chapman](#)  
**To:** [Exhibits JTPUFR](#)  
**Subject:** Testimony for the Oregon Legislature's Joint Committee on Transparent Policing and Use of Force Reform  
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To the Joint Committee on Transparent Policing and Use of Force Reform,

I am a lifelong Oregonian and a longtime resident of Salem, OR. I am not an expert on policing or on social justice. But I am writing today as a citizen who has watched these protests over the past few weeks as they have happened in Oregon and across the country.

In response to the murder of George Floyd, Salem experienced a new type of protest that is not commonly seen here. Many likened it to the protests that happen in Portland - large groups gathering at night and engaging in civil disruption. What I saw was a peaceful group that refused to be silenced. I saw a group of protesters who were willing to stand up for what was right. They were not violent. They were not destructive. They were disruptive, but in the sense that they blocked traffic briefly, not that they were causing permanent damage. They also stood for many of us who were unable to attend the protests due to concerns related to COVID.

However, perhaps because these protests occurred at night, or perhaps because they didn't look like the family-friendly-on-the-weekend-during-the-day-with-a-permit protests this city is used to, or perhaps specifically because it was a protest against police brutality and for Black lives, the police showed up in force, in riot gear, and in stark opposition to the protesters. They used crowd control measures that are rarely seen in Salem including tear gas. They labeled the protesters as rioters, and punished the crowd for the actions of the few.

While I was unable to attend, I watched many of the live-streamed videos of the protest. What I saw was a group of protesters trying to police themselves when one or two people engaged in destructive behavior. For example, when one person decided to spray paint the statue on the Capitol steps, the entire group tried to stop him. When one person threw a water bottle in the direction of the police (literally, I don't think it got anywhere near an actual police officer), the entire group shouted at that person to stop. The City of Salem Police Department chose to attack the crowd rather than protect the crowd from the few disruptive elements.

I'd like to note that the use of crowd control tactics, like tear gas, actually have a counterproductive effect. These tactics turn a large crowd that would be effective at policing itself into smaller segregated groups which are impossible for the large crowd or event organizers to control.

But most importantly, these crowd control tactics cast a chilling effect upon protesters, sending the message that even engaging in peaceful protest in quiet Salem, Oregon could bring police violence down upon you.

As you are debating the best way to address police use of force, please keep in the forefront how these behaviors affect innocent citizens engaged in civic discourse. In closing, I'd like to share the letter that I sent to the Salem City Council in response to these events. Thank you for your time and your consideration of this important issue.

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To the Salem City Council, Mayor, and other involved parties,

I'm a nearly lifelong Salem resident and a sixth generation Oregonian. My ancestors have been mayors and judges, have been the namesake for city streets, and benefactors of this state for as long as it has been a state. And I am so incredibly ashamed of my elected officials right now.

I've listened day after day to the stories from Black mothers as they tell about their sons and daughters that have died at the hands of the police. I have heard them speak about "The Talk" they must have with their children, about how they have to tell their children how to act, how to dress, how to speak, how to not attract attention, so as to be safe when even just going to the park or going to the grocery store or going for a run. On the one hand, I know that as a White mother of two White children, I am privileged to not have to have those conversations with my son and daughter. On the other hand, as a mother, and simply as a human being, it absolutely breaks my heart that anyone, anywhere would ever have to have those conversations.

The murder of Black men, women, boys and girls at the hands of police is a national epidemic. We must do everything in our power to stop this immediately. And yet, rather than recognizing the importance of this issue, rather than acknowledging the incredibly basic fact that no one should have to fear the police simply because of the color of their skin, the City of Salem and the Salem Police Department chose to use their power to silence protesters. When the protests first began in earnest, you chose to use tear gas and flash bang grenades indiscriminately on crowds of people. You chose to make protesting more dangerous than simply staying home.

Ostensibly you did this to stop looting and crime; however, this justification quickly falls short in the face of simple logic. At a crowded concert if a fist fight breaks out, you wouldn't throw flash bangs on the entire crowd of concert-goers. At the State Fair if a booth was robbed, you wouldn't throw tear gas indiscriminately at every child playing games at the booths. This is not how crowd control is handled in every other situation, and it is not how it should be handled at protests either.

I cannot imagine any valid justification for the actions of this city, and they make me ashamed to call myself a resident. But more than that I mourn for all the voices that are not being heard at this moment.

I know that you have since allowed weekend "permitted" protests, and I'm sure that makes you feel better about how you've handled this situation. I wholeheartedly disagree. You do not get to choose the manner in which you are protested. By immediately attacking protesters, you chose to engage in the exact kind of behavior that they were protesting against – unchecked police brutality upon its citizens. Your actions in those first few days speaks volumes louder than your silence now. You destroyed all possible faith that you would choose to be part of the solution rather than the problem.

If you feel that I am wrong in my assessment of you, then there is only one course of action - change it. If you truly believe in the very simple and very basic premises that Black lives matter, and police brutality is wrong, and that all life is precious, and that the police should not have an unchecked ability to murder people in the streets, you are going to have to shout it from the rooftops. Right now, I can't hear you over the sound of those flash bang grenades.

Natasha Chapman

