

Dear Committee Members,

I am a family medicine doctor and a lawyer, living in Portland, and I am writing today to ask that you declare your support for HB4208 and ban all future police use of tear gas against Portland citizens.

The use of tear gas, prior to the presence of a global respiratory pandemic, was morally indefensible. Over and over, video recordings have shown that -- far from its putative role as a non-violent dispersal agent -- it has been used as an aggressive, malicious, and deeply injurious weapon, often against entirely peaceful members of our community, and often those from the most vulnerable communities.

In the setting of COVID-19, this already deeply disturbing misuse of weaponized gas is nothing short of a public health crisis. The use of tear gas -- often, horrifyingly, after forcible removal of protestors' masks -- is what we call in medicine an "aerosol generating" process. The tearing, coughing, and choking that it directly causes is responsible for a vast increase in small, high velocity respiratory droplets that linger in the surrounding air for hours, at multiple orders of magnitude greater levels than normal respiration, especially in the absence of forcible mask removal. In short, the capacity for community spread of COVID-19 is directly and profoundly increased by the use of tear gas on community protestors.

The situation, truly, is not a nuanced one. The weaponized application of deeply harmful tear gas against peaceful community protestors has always been a moral and physical wrong. It is now also a public health wrong. Please join me, my colleagues in medicine, and the greater Portland community in putting an end to this self-inflicted tragedy. Please publicly support and vote for HB4208.

Respectfully,

Daniel P. Slowey, MD, JD