

Dear Committee Members,

When I chose to become a family physician for the Portland community, I promised to advocate for my patients in any way I can. That's why I am writing today to ask that you declare your support for HB4208 and ban future police use of tear gas against Portland citizens.

Particularly in light of the current COVID pandemic, the use of tear gas is not only reprehensible but a clear threat to public health. Current city and state measures designed to contain the pandemic are directly threatened by the use of these weapons that provoke coughing and respiratory distress, both of which can aerosolize infectious COVID virus particles to spread infection. Its use also risks provoking life-threatening respiratory distress in individuals with underlying lung conditions at a time when medical respiratory supplies are of critical importance. If for no other reason than this, it is imperative that you all vote in support HB4208 today.

However, the use of tear gas was unjust well before COVID. No matter the stated intentions of those using it, current use by PPB to disperse BLM protests has shown it is a weapon of white supremacy to quiet the voices of Portland citizens demanding the changes they need to protect their own lives and the lives of BIPOC community members they love. The fact that a tear gas canister was also recently further weaponized for violent use as a projectile against a peaceful protestor is further evidence that tear gas is a dangerous tool that has no place as a tool for "peacekeeping" in our streets.

My colleagues and I have seen multiple patients in the clinic and emergency room with injuries stemming from violent and inappropriate use of tear gas that threatens to pit us against our colleagues in law enforcement at a time when unity is needed more than ever. And again, I cannot state more emphatically how the continued use of tear gas only continues to exacerbate the mounting stress on local healthcare systems already in the midst of an unparalleled pandemic.

Committee Members, I implore you to support HB4208 today and ban the continued use of tear gas as a weapon to quiet the bold and brave voices of Portlanders willing to stand up for their beliefs and continue making Portland the great city we all seek to protect. I am your ally in that fight and it is my hope that in your votes for HB4208, you can agree with me that our fellow citizens (and my patients) are as well.

Respectfully,  
Dr. Benjamin Colburn  
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