

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Laura Jensen and I am a resident of Portland. I thank you for this opportunity to speak on the issue of police use of force and specifically on the use of teargas against protesters in recent weeks. I am horrified and dismayed at the behavior of police around the country and in particular in Portland following the murder of Mr. George Floyd.

I doubt my name is familiar to you, but I am the now-former non-sworn employee of the Portland Police Bureau whose email was published in *Willamette Week* on 05 June 2020. My email was satire; I had hoped to shock and shame my colleagues into realizing how terrible the acts of Portland Police officers in the preceding week had been, how lasting the damage would be, and how negatively they would impact the already bad image that Portland Police had among residents of Portland. Instead of recognizing it as the wake-up call it was meant to be, my supervisors apparently thought that I had had a mental break; in the end, I resigned from Portland Police Records Division in absolute disgust at their short-sightedness and lack of human empathy as well as in solidarity with the cause of the protests. To my knowledge I am the only employee of the Portland Police Bureau to have resigned in solidarity with the protesters, and possibly the only employee of a law enforcement agency in Oregon or elsewhere to have done so. I am currently seeking new employment that will better respect the civil and human rights of the residents of the city of Portland.

Today, Friday, July 17, you are meeting to discuss the issue of police use of force and more specifically use of teargas. Portland Police officers have abused both to such a degree that court orders have been required to protect protesters and journalists, and yet officers continue to violate those court orders almost nightly for all to see. Those who are not horrified by the actions of Portland Police and by police around the country must be blind to reality – how can you not be heartbroken at the now nearly infinite photos and videos showing the evidence of physical harm experienced by protesters and bystanders in American cities including Portland? Portland Police officers have used vehicles in a threatening manner towards protesters, have shot a variety of impact munitions towards protesters without following protocol for the use of those munitions (which means that the physical harm is all the greater), and have arrested protesters and journalists alike on nonsense charges that cannot be substantiated. They have stolen property from protesters and threatened them. The treatment of arrested Portlanders has ranged from the incompetent to the horrifically malicious: when journalist Lesley McLam was finally released after a trumped up felony charge, she was not given back her prescription glasses, while when protester Juniper Simonis was arrested for using chalk to delineate property lines so that protesters would not risk antagonizing federal officers, there were threats to euthanize Juniper's service dog. Recently, on the night of July 14-15, officers from an unknown agency were seen kidnapping protesters and putting them into unmarked vehicles near the Justice Center in downtown Portland; several journalists who were documenting the protest caught this on video. The use of force and abuse of power is rampant in Portland and while the Portland Police Bureau was the instigator, it is also evident in the behavior of every other law enforcement agency that is assisting them and in particular in the federal agencies that President Trump has sent to occupy the city.

Despite the fact that I have not attended protests due to my own health concerns and my uncertain safety after calling out the Bureau for their unconscionable acts, I have been exposed to teargas and other so-called “crowd control” devices nonetheless. I was working in the Justice Center on Friday, May 29, Saturday, May 30, and Sunday, May 31, on afternoon shift, which ends shortly before midnight. The Portland Police Bureau Records Division is housed on one of the highest floors of the Justice Center and yet we were able to detect the teargas in our office; please think a moment at how much teargas must have been in use for that to happen and what that meant for the people on the ground. We could also hear the sometimes continuous explosions of flashbangs and fired munitions and the ominous announcements of officers over loudspeakers. For several days at the beginning of June, I jumped at every loud noise because I had heard so many explosions during those three days of work. I do not know if I had enough exposure to teargas to cause any long-term health problems, but it is well-known by now that teargas is dangerous and especially now, in the midst of a pandemic, should not be in use.

First, teargas causes irritation to the lungs and entire breathing system, causing coughing and loss of breath. We are currently in a pandemic of a disease that is largely spread by coughing and while there have been no ties between increases in the spread of Covid-19 and protests, likely because most people at these protests are smart enough to wear masks, the common and instinctual human reaction to sudden coughing and loss of breath in these sorts of situations is to remove any physical barriers, such as a mask. This alone should necessitate a ban on the use of teargas in this country. But even if the pandemic were not an issue, the irritation to the lungs caused by teargas is enough to kill people who are compromised due to asthma and other chronic illnesses. There are documented cases of otherwise healthy people requiring hospitalization or even dying due to teargas exposure. No act carried out by a protester necessitates a potential death penalty.

Second, teargas is an abortifacient. I thought that conservatives, who seem to delight in the use of teargas against protesters, were against abortion in any form. Perhaps I am mistaken in my understanding of conservative politics. Nonetheless this health risk should also immediately bring about a ban on the use of teargas. One of my colleagues in the Records Division those three nights at the end of May was pregnant and only had a cloth mask for protection; I do not think she appreciated being exposed to teargas, let alone the stress of the warzone that Portland Police officers had unnecessarily created contrary to their de-escalation training. I hope that she sues the Bureau into the ground if anything goes wrong with her pregnancy. Many protesters have also reported abnormal menstrual cycles due to exposure to teargas; I wonder if any of them wished to be pregnant and had their hopes dashed because Portland Police could not control themselves when given such power.

Third, several journalists have documented that the teargas canisters and other munitions being used by Portland Police and other agencies in Portland are marked with expired dates, as proven by the empty canisters that they have picked up after police attacks and advances on protesters. I am not a chemist; I cannot speak as an expert or an authority on the decay of the chemicals involved in these products. However, common sense tells me that using anything that is past its expiration date should give you pause and due consideration. I suspect that there are few studies in reputable medical journals on the effects of expired teargas on the human body, let alone the role of expired teargas in a pandemic. Even

if teargas is not completely banned, surely a ban on expired products cannot be too much of an imposition?

Fourth, teargas has been used indiscriminately, irresponsibly, and without due consideration for the total safety of the community. There are innumerable reports of teargas leaking into homes in surrounding areas; clearly it is not something that can be reasonably controlled and contained only to the location where protesters are standing. Similarly, it reaches vertically as well as horizontally, as demonstrated by my own experiences in the Justice Center that last weekend of May. Again, at a time when many people are quarantining in their homes to avoid exposure to Covid-19, law enforcement is endangering them by exposing them against their will to something that irritates the very parts of the body that Covid-19 initially attacks: the lungs. Additionally, many members of our unhoused population have been teargassed, again, because it spreads so easily and officers have used it so indiscriminately. Like people living in physical houses, do the unhoused not have the right to peacefully sleep without being terrorized simply because they chose the wrong sidewalk or park to lay out a sleeping bag or pitch their tent on that night? As well as all of these, on numerous occasions officers have deployed teargas while traffic was still moving, as if wanting to invite every possible tragedy by creating car accidents as well – we have been exceptionally lucky that Portland drivers seem more level-headed in these situations than law enforcement officers and no accidents have been reported, as far as I know.

Finally, if my testimony of demonstrated inhumanity, cruelty, and general irresponsibility do not move you, let me appeal to your sense of fiscal responsibility. Like many other Portlanders, I was shocked when reports came out in recent weeks showing how much money Portland Police was spending on buying more teargas and other “crowd-control” devices and how quickly they did this after the protests began. This level of spending is yet another sign that Portland Police cannot be trusted to monitor and control themselves: we are in the midst of a pandemic, an economic meltdown, a never-ending homelessness crisis, and even government employees are being furloughed. Yet Portland Police can spend tens of thousands of dollars, if not more, on a moment’s notice to buy weapons of war to use against its own citizens and spend even more thousands and millions of dollars on overtime for officers to terrorize protesters and journalists. Even if the money spent on teargas and other products was already allocated to Portland Police and therefore had to be spent by some entity within the Portland Police Bureau, there are so many better uses; within my former division, Records, our computers limp along always at death’s door – when we were evacuated to another precinct on Sunday, May 31, and began setting up our work at the new location, one of my colleagues immediately commented on how nice and easy it was to use the computers there compared to the ones we used every day. Likewise, as part of the effort to reduce the number of people in the office at one time but still try to keep up on our very necessary work, we were using work laptops at home to process reports – but there were only three laptops for the several dozen of us to share; how many laptops and other necessary accessories could Portland Police have purchased for the cost of several canisters of teargas? I guarantee it would have resulted in a more positive impact as those reports would have made it to the necessary authorities much quicker – for example, reports of child abuse being forwarded to the Department of Human Services. I think the community at large would have vastly preferred that to yet more teargas and impact munitions. I am certain other divisions within Portland Police could have come up with other

ideas to use the money productively and responsibly. If the money came from a general fund for the City of Portland, then I am certain there are even more uses that would have put our city council in voters' good graces better than what has actually happened. That so much money has been spent already in this manner and more will likely be spent similarly should outrage the conscience of every voter.

In a recent communication with Portland city council member Joann Hardesty, Chief Lovell of Portland Police stated that he did not think that Portland Police had made any mistakes or missteps during the protests so far. The fact that he can say such a thing is another outrage and yet more proof that Portland Police is out of control and cannot be trusted with the power that they have been given, including but not limited to access to and use of teargas. Members of Portland Police, such as Chief Lovell, Public Information Officer Tina Jones, and Portland Police Association president Daryl Turner talk about the protesters in Portland like they are feral animals, but the reporting that I have seen shows quite the opposite: there is tremendous care, sensitivity, and kindness on display every day and night. People educate each other, feed each other, and donate what little they have in this difficult economic moment. They watch out for each other: community-building is central to the cause that has brought them together. Yes, there has been some vandalism; yes, there is graffiti; yes, water bottles have been thrown. But what is vandalism to the life of a human being? What is graffiti to Donovan LaBella's brain? What threat is a water bottle to an officer decked out in combat gear? The response of Portland Police to the protests that have taken place in Portland for almost 50 days now has done exactly one thing: it has proven that the protesters are right and police brutality is still an ever-present danger in the city of Portland.

Members of this committee, Portland Police Bureau has lost what little credibility it still had with the citizens of Portland. Something must be done and if the first step is to ban or restrict their ability to use teargas, then so be it. When your teenager crashes your car, you do not hand them the keys again the next day; you ground them and try to teach them the errors of their ways while they earn back your trust. Portland Police has not only crashed the car, they have rolled it, hit twenty pedestrians, knocked over half the stands at Saturday Market, killed every person sleeping under the Burnside Bridge, and set every vehicle in a three mile radius on fire, including the one they were driving. I do not know what they could possibly do to ever earn back the trust of the people of Portland, if they ever truly had their trust. The very least you can do is ban the use of teargas in the state of Oregon.

Thank you for your time.

Laura Jensen

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