

To: The Oregon Legislature Joint Committee on Transparent Policing and Use of Force Reform

I believe that tear gas should be banned for use against civilians in any circumstance. Tear gas has been banned for warfare since 1925 and it is against the Geneva Convention for tear gas to be deployed in war. Thus, it is fundamentally illogical that it be used against civilian populations and its use should be prohibited. It has no place in the streets of this country where citizens are assembling to exercise their free speech rights and the right to petition the government for redress of grievances, as outlined in the Constitution.

CS gas (*o*-Chlorobenzylidene malononitrile) can have permanent, severe, and sometimes life-threatening effects on skin, respiratory systems, and eyes. Police, demonstrators, bystanders, people in their homes and secondarily-exposed healthcare workers have been injured by tear gas. During a pandemic of respiratory disease, it is excessively reckless to expose people in a crowd, those in their homes or in the area to lung irritants. The riot exemption must be removed, as we have already seen police in Oregon abusing this exemption to deploy tear gas on protesters.

One in ten people in Oregon has asthma, with disproportionate rates among Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Using tear gas arbitrarily and in any circumstance, puts BIPOC and others with varying levels of health or vulnerability, such as those with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), at risk of serious life-threatening illness. I also urge lawmakers to listen to the voices of Black community leaders to fundamentally transform our systems of public safety.

Thank you,

Pamela S. Vasquez

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