

July 18, 2020

Dear Co-chairs Rep Bynum and Senator Manning, and committee members,

Thank you for so quickly following up on the recently passed HB 4208 (2020). The need to do so is evidence of the fact that existing police culture and white supremacy are incredibly resilient, and that the path to a better society will require continued attention to ensure that the strength of the status quo is not allowed to absorb and nullify these necessary changes.

I join with many other individuals and organizations in asking you to amend HB 4208 (2020) to ban the use of gas for crowd control. Portland Police Bureau quickly adopted the language in the bill to allow them to “lawfully” declare a riot and deploy tear gas against Portlanders protesting police violence. Tear gas and other crowd control measures are indiscriminate, cruel and unusual in their effects, and inflict collective punishment, which is antithetical to our philosophy as a society. I urge you to amend the statute to deny the use of gas and munitions on Oregonians and ensure that the spirit of the law cannot be ignored.

Video from protesters and journalists, as well as testimony on social media, hearings of various city committees and this committee, provide a strong counter narrative to PPB’s perspective and reduce their credibility. For example, in Friday’s hearing, Deputy Chief Chris Davis asserted that PPB’s response had started out peacefully, but we know that is a lie. They have used tear gas and violence from the beginning. He resorted to legalistic tricks in response to a question about kettling, saying he didn’t know of any “planned” kettling. While I have stayed at home for the protests (deterred by COVID and then, of course, police violence), I personally know and trust numerous co-workers and folks I have organized with over the last 4 years who are clear: the violence is coming from the police. You have heard testimony from some of these trusted individuals in this hearing.

It is ludicrous for Mayor Wheeler to act as if the federal police are the only police guilty of violence. As I was watching Friday’s committee testimony late at night, PPB was simultaneously doing the following downtown:

- “Bull rushing,” tackling, and beating protesters who had followed police instructions to move and were walking away, with their backs turned. Video: [https://twitter.com/alex\\_zee/status/1284415698123386882](https://twitter.com/alex_zee/status/1284415698123386882)
- Coordinating with federal police (something the mayor and PPB leadership denies occurs) to drive protesters away from a downtown Portland park. Video: <https://twitter.com/MrOlmos/status/1284409811484860417>
- Seizing and damaging a UHaul truck operated by community organizer Riot Ribs, which was attempting to recover and distribute belongings that had been swept when police cleared the park with 10 minutes notice on Thursday. Video: [https://twitter.com/alex\\_zee/status/1284419874438082560](https://twitter.com/alex_zee/status/1284419874438082560)

I want to acknowledge that policing is a difficult job and these are difficult circumstances. However, it must be said that Portland Police Bureau, (including police commissioner and Mayor, Ted Wheeler), Multnomah County Sheriff, and State Police, are abusing protesters and gaslighting all of us. As with all abusers, they have only one answer to our cries for justice and peace: "Why are you making us hurt you? You asked for it. You made me do it." I have listened to hours of public comment by PPB and Portland residents, and the pattern is clear and disturbing: PPB & the Mayor cite procedure, say that officers have acted lawfully, deny any wrongdoing, and refer people to the complaint system, which is designed to address bad acts by individual officers. They say that good cops will report bad behavior, yet we have video evidence of officers saying nothing while their colleagues swat a phone out of a protester's hand (conveniently breaking a window and providing the excuse to declare a riot and deploy gas), lift a protester's mask and spray pepper spray directly into a protester's face, tackle people, hit them with batons, and more.

This "blue wall" of obfuscation is slippery and our systems of accountability are outmoded and inadequate for our present moment, which is not about individual bad actions but about the collective system. By continuing to lie, deflect, and run the same playbook night after night (no matter what they do, nearly every night ends with tear gas and police violence against protesters). The police have shown they cannot be trusted to act with anything but violence against protesters, and therefore the committee must deny them some of the most egregious weapons they are deploying against protesters.

I wish to thank in particular my Senator, Lew Frederick, who has responded with alacrity to address the legislative fixes that are needed to address police violence, been present in public conversations, shared his experiences as a Black American, and continued to be accessible to his constituents. I am very appreciative.

Thank you for addressing this critical matter,

Lisa Wright  
Portland, OR

cc: Mayor Ted Wheeler, Commissioner Joann Hardesty, Commissioner Amanda Fritz,  
Commissioner Chloe Eudaly