

Dear committee members,

I am a resident of Oregon and live in unincorporated Washington County. I have repeatedly observed law enforcement personnel respond to a crowd of protesters with unnecessary, indiscriminate and disproportionate violence. The protesters were overwhelmingly individuals that were peacefully voicing their objection to the overreach demonstrated by said federal personnel and support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement, in line with their constitutional rights.

I saw no legitimate reason for the use of tear gas or other "less-lethal" munitions, as no federal personnel were personally threatened by even the few non-peaceful protesters in the crowd until they exited the building to confront the protesters. During each of the last few days' protests, I did not observe incremental damage to the building, much less threats to the officers inside, that could have justified the extreme response that appeared to be designed to discourage protesters from the exercise of their rights.

The use of tear gas, a substance that is banned by the Geneva Convention from being used during war, is now routinely being used on US citizens by its own government and law enforcement agencies. Justification through the declaration of a "riot" seems to be far too easy, and has been abused every day by federal law enforcement in Portland.

In addition to the gas itself, the use of the canisters as projectiles aimed directly at protesters is obviously more than troubling, but fits the pattern of the aggressive use of other so-called "less-lethal" munitions that has been observed in Portland and that, on multiple occasions, has caused significant injury to peaceful, nonviolent protesters exercising their First Amendment rights.

As a result, many people have been discouraged from participating not only in the protest against the actions by the federal government, but also in the peaceful BLM protests in front of the Justice Center, be it due to health issues that would be exacerbated by exposure to tear gas, or due to fear of being fired upon with some of the other projectiles.

Given the clearly reasonable grievances being expressed through civil disobedience, I don't see how we can possibly justify the violent response from law enforcement agencies, and I hope that we can put our state on a path that will give us a better chance at achieving true equality for all, in the very near future. We have a lot of history to make up for.

Sincerely,

Peter Hoeckel
Portland, OR 97229