

Police Reform

Dear Madam and Sir:

I am a Portland, Oregon, resident. I am a mother, wife, and a documentary photographer/filmmaker. My family lives blocks from the Federal Building and the Justice Center. As you probably know, these 2 building are adjacent to each other, and have been the location of some of the most intense protests. This is where police and the feds have used "less lethal" munitions on protestors. Nightly, Portland police shoot profuse amounts of tear gas into our air so that it becomes permeated with the toxic smell of these banned-in-warfare chemicals. The residue is now in our stormwater system. As a supporter of human rights for all, especially black and indigenous people who have suffered the most in this country, I have attended and documented several of the protests. What I've seen has shocked me.

On several occasions, I witnessed police - with little or no provocation - declare a riot and immediately begin bull-rushing, kettling, and using munitions on protestors. They proceed to shoot so much tear gas in the air that several blocks are filled with the toxic smoke. I have seen mothers post on social media that they smell the tear gas in their homes and fear for their pregnancy and/or children's safety. On more than one occasion it has seeped into my home. I have spent several hours calling various organizations such as Department of Environmental Quality, the Mayor's office, City Council Members, etc, but to no avail. The excessive use of flash bang grenades is also disturbing. Some nights, until 3 or 4 in the morning, these would be shot so frequently it sounded as if we were living in a war zone. I have also seen police beat on protestors. Just this past Monday, police so severely beat a nurse from Oregon Health and Science University that he ended up having to be treated at the very hospital where he works. And yet, when right-wing extremists (such as Patriot Prayer, The Proud Boys, The Oath Keepers, etc) come to Portland, the Portland Police bureau lets them have full reign of our streets. These extremists have been coming to Portland since 2017 to have "rallies". Inevitably fights ensue, and Portland Police are notorious for letting these right-wing militias do as they wish.

I want to say here that for everything listed above, there is video evidence. For all of it. There's video of physical brutality on protestors, tear gas filling the streets with toxic smoke, the frequent use of flash bang grenades, police rushing at and kettling protestors who are simply marching or chanting, and finally - the right-wing militias using bear mace and paintballs on Portlanders. There's footage of right-wing militias driving around without license plates, getting out of their trucks and attacking people. And when you see the footage of the right-wing attacks, the police are never around. Never. It is clear that the Portland Police are connected to these extremist/racist groups. This is not conjecture. I'm sure you know that a year or 2 ago news came out that

Portland police and members of these right-wing groups were exchanging texts. Essentially, if we are going to have some kind of police presence, they shouldn't be connected to or in a right-wing racist group. And they should be from Portland, not suburbs outside the city, and not from Washington either.

I am urging you for the following: (1) Please create an accountability group - with no ties to PPB - that monitors police activity and holds them accountable when they brutalize citizens. Make sure this group cannot be threatened by police. (I say this because I sometimes wonder if Ted Wheeler has been threatened by PPB. This is the only reason I can think of that would make sense of his behavior.) (2) Make sure all police wear clear and visible identification. One of the most disturbing things about the brief federal presence in Portland was that none of these men wore identification. Last I checked this is not a fascist dictatorship where citizens get carted-off in unmarked vehicles by law enforcement that wear no identification. Also, Portland police are notorious for covering up all or part of their ID. This is not acceptable. (3) Immediately stop the use of tear gas on citizens. Tear gas is a chemical weapon banned in warfare, and yet several times a night police use it on American citizens. The longterm impacts are unknown. They are using these chemicals in residential neighborhoods (and that includes downtown Portland). This out-of-control, overzealous use of tear gas is dangerous, and sadly a microcosm of a much larger problem of polluting our air, water, and populace without concern for the long-term impacts. (4) We need a publicly available database that lists misconduct and discipline of public safety employees. (5) We need the Oregon Criminal Justice commission to establish a stateside database of reports of use of physical force by all police officers. (5) End Qualified Immunity. We all know it serves no one but law enforcement that is engaging in abusive/illegal activity.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. The people are protesting because our police department is corrupted, not trusted, abusive, brutal, cruel, scary, and they are in a disturbing relationship with right-wing extremists. My tax dollars should not be paying for this. And if no changes are made, the people are going to have take action via our dollars/tax money. Change is necessary - and now. Just imagine how much pain we could avoid, and how much time/money we could save - if these measures were put in to place. The protests would end. We desperately need change.

Sincerely,
Irene T. H.

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