

Draft letter to Portland city leadership

We, the Concordia Neighborhood Association, demand change in the Portland Police Bureau (PPB). The bureau has proven to focus on defending and serving itself and its own interests above those of the community:

- It has supported and aided invaders instead of defending the city from invasion. It provides escort for armed out-of-town fascist vigilantes coming – and leaving – in caravans to shoot paint balls, pepper spray and mace, while brandishing guns and assaulting and/or threatening our citizens.
- It has failed to respond to incidents in a timely fashion. In one very local case, a family had to wait over 18 hours for a response to their home being riddled with bullets. They are the only black family on their block, and the PPB hasn't proved – or disproved – yet whether the shooters were white militants.
- It has used tear gas and other chemical weapons – ones that would be illegal during times of war – on Portland citizens peacefully protesting racial injustice. Those chemicals have adverse long-term health impacts on humans, animals and vegetation.
- It has made no public acknowledgements of its own dysfunction or willingness to respond to community demands and/or work toward self-improvement.

So our neighborhood association wants to ensure an option is on the table to consider dissolving the current PPB and all its current contractual relationships, including with its employees and the Portland Police Association union.

That option calls for replacing PPB with a wholly new system of providing public safety in this city. We must ask the questions, “What does it mean to be protected and served?” and “How can the city best provide those functions to us?”

Whether we replace PPB or attempt to salvage and improve it, these concerns must be addressed and satisfied:

Eliminate police brutality: We need a police force that focuses on policing from a place of compassion, rather than brutality. That can include downsizing and rightsizing. At the very least, there must be a very quick path to becoming an ex-police bureau employee with no pension for any officer found to have engaged in, condoned or covered up instances of police-inflicted brutality, including both physical and verbal brutality.

Redirect the police bureau budget: We need to fund activities that offer Black residents support and social safety nets, as well as protection for all Portland residents.

Train and practice skills in de-escalation: Currently, PPB efforts escalate violence when engaging in crowd control. In fact, an outright ban within city limits is needed on the purchase or possession of tear gas and other chemical weapons by anyone, including police officers. They should act like what they call themselves: peace officers.

Respect First Amendment rights: Our state and federal constitutions allow citizens to protest peacefully, without being met with violence.

We must make a break with our past, recent and historic. And we must make it now.

It is no secret that Oregon was founded upon racist intentions, with exclusionary laws intended to discourage Blacks from ever living here, or owning property.

It was only in 2002 that the last of the racist language was removed from the Oregon Constitution. And 30% of voters opposed that.

The Concordia neighborhood was a target of active redline segregation policies that concentrated and limited the city's small Black population here in the 20th century. That fact calls upon us to be particularly cognizant of the systemic oppression of our neighbors. And it must energize us to join the ongoing battle to undo the harm committed for more than a century.

Black and brown residents and visitors to our neighborhood have been the subjects of racial profiling by police for decades. Lately, the PPB and law enforcement organizations in neighboring communities continue to represent visible and active levels of racism.

The idea that Black and brown lives matter is not up for dispute. It is our responsibility as a neighborhood – and as a city – to hold that truth high.