

PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU NEEDS TOOLS TO PROTECT COMMUNITY AND THEMSELVES DURING RIOTS THAT ENDANGER LIFE SAFETY



News Release from [\[/images/logo/3056/36339004_10155150159375904_5289555733182939136_n.jpg\]](#) **Portland Police Bureau**

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Since May 29, 2020, Portland Police and partner agencies have been subjected to repeated violence by a group of motivated and well-organized individuals. These individuals have stated they intend to kill or injure officers and destroy occupied buildings and dwellings. Threats to commit acts of violence have been scrawled on police facilities and other property. Crowds have chanted slogans about burning down buildings on their way to attempt to do that.

Rioters lit County offices on fire in a building which houses hundreds of inmates and public employees, as well as the Portland Police Central Precinct. Rioters barricaded doors shut at North Precinct and East Precinct and attempted to light the building on fire with employees and civilians inside. Officers have been attacked with rocks, glass bottles, frozen water bottles, lasers capable of causing permanent eye damage, ball bearings and sharp objects launched from slingshots, paint balloons (to render their face shields useless) as well as fire bombs, large fireworks, and other items.

Police officers have not been the only ones whose safety has been threatened during civil unrest in the city. Numerous community members have been assaulted, one person has been murdered, firearms have been discharged, and neighborhoods such as Kenton have been endangered by fires set in the streets and at the Portland Police Association office. Neighbors have been threatened and intimidated by people engaged in the nightly violence. Businesses have suffered losses from arson, vandalism and mass theft.

CS gas is a tool which has been used sparingly in the last 104 nights. We want to clear up a misconception that it is being used as crowd control. It is not. It is being used to disperse crowds only when there is a life safety event. Most recently, it was used to disperse a crowd from which a Molotov cocktail was thrown at officers and ended up injuring a community member who was on fire. We understand that this gas seeped into nearby homes and that is not something we desire. However, the community should be asking the rioters why they are committing violence that threatens the very lives of others nearby. When people gather lawfully, peacefully, there is no need for intervention by police, much less the use of CS gas. That is evident from several nights, even within the last 104 days, when people gathered and police had no need to interact to prevent crime or restore order. In fact, that happens all the time in Portland.

There are those who suggest police do not even respond to these crowd events. Many times, we do try not to. In the past, crowds have come to our precincts, vandalized cars, gates, security cameras, etc. and police do not confront the crowd. When this occurs, the crowd escalates and does something such as light a building on fire so police will have to engage them.

Banning the lawful use of CS will make it very difficult to address this kind of violence without resorting to much higher levels of physical force, with a correspondingly elevated risk of serious injury to members of the public and officers. CS, while effective, is a significantly lower level of force than impact weapons, which would very likely be necessary to disperse riotous groups with its prohibition. We do not want to use gas. We do not want to use any force.

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There remains an expectation that police will make arrests for crimes committed in civil disturbance events. The inability to use CS means this task will require higher levels of force to accomplish.

This is at odds with Portland Police Bureau Directive 1010.00, which states in relevant part:

The community expects and the Portland Police Bureau requires that members use only the objectively reasonable force necessary to perform their duties and overcome the threat or resistance of the subject under the totality of the circumstances.

To make an arrest in the middle of a crowd intent on destruction and injuring people, it takes considerable resources--large numbers of officers that we do not have. Not only do we not have enough PPB officers to respond in this manner, our area partners have stated they will not come to our aid, given the climate in Portland.

Police need all kinds of tools and resources to effectively respond to violence perpetrated by groups of people. Lately, it seems more tools have been taken away than added. There has been mention of research into alternative methods that may prevent the need for greater force. The Police Bureau is in favor of research, but research takes time. Removing tools without well vetted alternatives, with policies and training in place prior to their use, places police and community members at risk. No one has presented a solution of how officers can stop a rioting group who are threatening the lives of those present, especially given that in most of these cases, officers are clearly outnumbered, sometimes by hundreds.

Arson, vandalism, and violence are not going to drive change in this community. A Police Bureau without the necessary tools to protect its own members, or the community it serves, will not successfully help create the space for real change agents to do the hard work they hope to accomplish.

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