

June, 18 2020

Council President Peterson and Representatives of Metro Council,

As the Committee for Racial Equity for Oregon Metro, we serve as an advisory committee that is a critical component of Metro's efforts to advance racial equity; whose purpose is to "provide community oversight and opportunities for Metro to have greater accountability to the community on the implementation of the strategic plan." In the spirit of advising the council and advancing Metro's commitment to Racial Equity as well as holding the councilors accountable to that commitment, we are called to emphatically advise the council and implore you to heed our community-backed advice.

Metro's Racial Equity Strategic Plan puts forward a bold commitment: "Metro is committed to arriving at an equitable and prosperous Portland region where everyone has opportunities to enjoy a good quality of life. Taking a racial equity approach by removing barriers and increasing equitable outcomes for people of color in the region is the most intentional and effective path to get there." What has been painfully obvious to the Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color for centuries has been a struggle for White community members to acknowledge or recognize: the health and well-being of those communities are being threatened. The events of the last few weeks have further heightened the visibility of generations of injustice happening in Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color across the country and in Oregon as a result of systemic and militaristic police violence. We feel this is a critical point for CORE, Metro Leadership, and Councilors to speak up and use their privileged positions.

Two Portland-based community organizations, Portland African American Leadership Forum and Unite Oregon, offer this analysis:

"All across this country, Black people live with the everyday reality of being subjected to a police occupation. This is a form of state violence perpetrated against our community. As a people living in Black bodies, state-sanctioned violence, hyper-surveillance, and resulting disenfranchisement is a constant danger. Black folks who are poor, women, people who are currently and formerly incarcerated, working class, LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming, [disabled], and Black immigrants and refugees of all documentation status are particularly vulnerable. The physical and economic

violence of policing, incarceration, and judicial supervision can no longer be tolerated.

Police agencies in Portland, including Portland Police Bureau, Multnomah County Sheriff, Trimet police, and Portland State's Campus Public Safety officers, like police in other cities, maintain practices of violence against BIPOC people; poor and houseless people; queer, trans, and gender nonbinary people; and immigrants and refugees. The US Department of Justice is currently providing oversight to PPB due to documented abuses of those with, or perceived to have mental illness; and this most recent Settlement Agreement is not the first time that PPB has been under federal scrutiny for its racial profiling, use of force, and other abuses in the community. Yet officials continue to defend the system and resist externally driven reforms, and Portland Police Association defies community demands for accountability and change."

While past appeals have called for reform, regulation, training, and increased community oversight, the analysis has shifted to now acknowledge that our current systems *are beyond* reform. Diverse community members and groups have added their voice and support to the demands, built on years of community action from Don't Shoot PDX, Black Lives Matter, PAALF, and Unite Oregon. These demands are simple:

- Divest in Police,
- Reinvest in Black Lives, and
- Protect our Communities from Violence.

Before we proceed, we first need to stop all investment in programs, task forces, and further training programs that support a police state that kills Black, Indigenous, and people of color. There are also a host of solutions that reallocate police funds to address housing insecurities, physical and mental health needs, and a community-driven model for public safety.

President Peterson, you said in your statement released on June 1st that you reached out to Mayor Wheeler as well as Commissioner Hardesty to ask how Metro can help. We expect you to offer the same support to the organizations whose calls for change have gone unanswered for years.

We're not asking for the creation of new solutions to this problem by Metro; those asks and proposed solutions have already been made for years by the Black community.

What we are asking is that all members of Metro, from President Peterson to the Councilors, the COO and all Metro Staff, use their positions, privilege, and representative power to amplify and stand by those proposed solutions from the Black community.

Metro is a group of elected officials representing districts of the Portland Metropolitan area; you are a regional governing body. Your Black constituents are hurting and dying and it is incumbent upon Metro to act swiftly to put their support and political power behind the Black Organizations that have been calling for these changes for years.

As the City of Portland and Multnomah County consider this call to action from community groups, we believe Metro's leadership is important. This is a key moment for Metro to meaningfully consider what investing in Black lives means in both supporting a divestment from policing to investment and implementation of community-driven solutions that ground so much of Metro's Racial Equity Strategic Plan.

CORE stands in full support of this movement and the proposed changes outlined by a growing coalition across our city led by PAALF and Unite Oregon. We know that Black Lives Matter. We call upon you as leaders to set an example for local and county governments, and send the message that Metro knows it will take bold action to truly center BIPOC communities.

Thank you,

Signed:

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