



**Only Strong Communities Can Combat COVID-19:
Communities Unite to Demand a Bold Vision for a Strong and Healthy Portland**

To Multnomah County, Portland City and Metro Officials:

In response to the spread of the COVID-19 virus, one of the most severe public health crises in modern times, we are a wide and diverse range of Portland community organizations and advocacy groups that have come together to put forth joint demands to ensure the health and safety of all of our community members. We will only be as successful in our collective effort to endure COVID-19 as we are able to care for all of our residents, especially for those most vulnerable.

People imprisoned in immigrant detention centers, county jails, and prisons; heavily policed Black & brown neighborhoods; community members who are houseless or with precarious housing; workers who are being forced into the workplace because of a lack of guaranteed sick pay; poor and young people of color without access to resources and services as a result of school closures; those without adequate access to health care--communities that are already socially and economically marginalized--are most vulnerable to being drastically impacted by COVID-19. Importantly, these same communities are also under the greatest threat of any

punitive measures by law enforcement that may come as a result of the government's attempt to mitigate COVID-19 and all its negative collateral consequences. **It is thus imperative that the responses to this public health crisis revolve around distributing resources to communities to ensure all needs are met—they *can not* revolve around criminalization, fining, threat of jail time, or any other form of policing, which also includes surveillance or enforcement by the US military or national guard.**

In these unprecedented times, elected officials and civilians alike are taking unprecedented action to protect everyone, starting with those most vulnerable. In particular, we are seeing emergency funding going to those unable to work or required to work because of lack of sick pay, rent freezes, and decarceration of jails and prisons (both in the U.S. and abroad). These are the only acceptable responses to the dire threat posed by COVID-19, and Portland and Multnomah County being among the most progressive cities and counties in the country, should be demonstrating bold leadership in this capacity. Just last week, even Washington County took the step of releasing 121 people incarcerated in its jail to help stop the COVID-19 spread¹.

Spending strategically on the front end will insulate us from crisis later, where the tools of policing, surveillance, and imprisonment will become ever more attractive options to the government. But we know that the safest and healthiest places are those in which all people have their basic needs met. It is of critical importance that the City of Portland and Multnomah County take concerted action (appealing to higher levels of government where necessary) to ensure we come out of this pandemic stronger than we've ever been, not devastated by a preventable crisis. Public funding *is* available, particularly when reallocated from the police and jail budgets.

We are putting forward proactive demands that will protect all Portlanders, as well as calling for measures in response to threatening actions that some in our community are already enduring.

Demands

- Immediately release anyone being held in Portland's ICE detention center, halt all ICE sweeps, and halt all immigrant transport to the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington.
- Immediately release all people being held pretrial in Multnomah County jails (MCDC, Inverness, and the Donald E. Long Youth Detention Facility), and those who have been

¹https://www.kptv.com/news/washington-county-jail-releases-some-inmates-to-prevent-spread-of/article_34cdc2c2-68d3-11ea-bfc0-3725e49b0c0c.html

serving misdemeanor sentences in those facilities. These releases should NOT be coupled with electronic monitoring.

- Immediately halt all transport to Coffee Creek Correctional Facility for those who have recently been convicted on felony charges and sentenced to serve prison time.
- Immediately release all prisoners held in the state's minimum security prison, Columbia River Correctional Institution.
- Immediately release all prisoners over 50 and those who have underlying health conditions that will be more at risk of a lethal COVID-19 infection, as well as those who have one year or less left in their sentence. For all others, identify community based diversion programs and reentry services that can support their swift release.
- Maintain the eviction moratorium, including expanding the moratorium to include all renters in Oregon, and immediately implement a rent freeze where rent is not required to be paid later. Implement a freeze on mortgage payments.
- Immediately freeze all Trimet public transit fare.
- Immediately provide guaranteed sick pay for workers who do not have it.
- Immediately enable those unhoused, those being released from jail and prison facilities with no housing set up, and those fleeing domestic violence situations to inhabit vacant properties across the city, free of charge, and in a long-term capacity.
- Immediately end all police sweeps and patrols of houseless community members.
- Immediately end all quality of life policing activity.
- Immediately place a moratorium on all arrests made by the Portland Police Bureau and Multnomah County Sheriff's Office.
- Immediately eliminate the Gun Violence Reduction Team (previously the "Gang Enforcement Team"), to stop its well documented practice of targeting people of color in Black and brown neighborhoods, and particularly of youth, especially as Portland has temporarily closed its schools.

Reasons

Incarceration: Prisons, jails, and detention centers are known incubators for the spread of diseases. The Health Affairs journal notes that our "nation's experience with tuberculosis, HIV and the ongoing hepatitis C epidemic has taught us that correctional settings are reservoirs of infectious diseases. Prisons push people into the paths of epidemics."² The Human Impact Partners' Health Instead of Punishment Program has also published a national report detailing the harms of pretrial and immigrant detention from a public health perspective.³ Prisoners at the Columbia River Correctional Institution are sleeping in 80-person rooms, potentially sick prisoners are only isolated or transferred for 72 hours in a doorless room, and "isolated" prisoners are still eating meals with the general population. Solitary confinement is in no way a solution to this. In order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 inside of the jail system, prison system, and ICE detention center, we must release people back into their communities. To reiterate, decarceration is the *only* way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through these facilities, as infection is a matter of *when*, not *if* the virus will make its way inside.

Housing and Houselessness: The practices of quarantining, isolating, or social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 require that all community members have access to housing. As measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 (recommended by the CDC)⁴, major cities have taken steps to 1) end housing evictions, and 2) halt all police targeting and sweeps of houseless community members. Additionally, California officials announced that the state will be taking over hotels and motels to house currently houseless people.⁵ Again, we call on Portland officials to immediately follow suit. We also call on the city to allow currently unhoused community members to inhabit vacant properties, as well as the subsidization of other housing options (e.g. residential hotels).

Policing and Criminalization: During a time of public health crisis, our city must first and foremost prioritize a health response. Law enforcement responses will not only result in the further criminalization of community members targeted and discriminated against by police, but will also squander city resources that should be used toward bolstering community health. With the City of Portland temporarily shutting down its schools, we reiterate the demand to eliminate the PPB's Gun Violence Reduction Team, which we anticipate will ramp up its efforts to target Black and brown people, especially youth. We reiterate the demand to immediately end "quality of life" policing, which targets our residents for their mere efforts to live and survive, and will

²<https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200310.290180/full/>

³https://humanimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/HIP_HealthNotBailNationalReport_2020.02_reduced.pdf

⁴<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html>

⁵<https://twitter.com/GavinNewsom/status/1239309428903391232?s=20>

lead to increases to arrests and imprisonment (which, as noted above, must be drastically reduced to effectively mitigate COVID-19 inside jail settings). Additionally, we reiterate the demand to put a moratorium on arrests, which police officers already have broad discretion for, and which will help immensely in stopping the spread of COVID-19 through imprisoned populations.

Signed,

Care Not Cops

Critical Resistance Portland

Asians for Black Lives, Portland Chapter

Brown Girl Rise

Carceral Tech Resistance Network

CAREpdx

Cascade Abortion Support Collective

Community Alliance of Tenants

Democratic Socialists of America, Portland, OR Chapter

Decrim Oregon

Don't Shoot PDX

Free Lunch Collective PDX

Glitter Squadron

National Lawyers Guild, Lewis & Clark Law School Chapter

Oregon DA for the People

Organizing Committee of the Growing Seeds Workers Union

PDX Childcare Collective

PDX Disability Justice Collective

Stop the Sweeps PDX

STROLL PDX

SURJ PDX Black Lives Matter Action Group