



The League of Women Voters

OF PORTLAND OREGON

310 SW 4TH AVE., SUITE 520, PORTLAND, OREGON 97204 (503) 228-1675

Charter Review Commission Meeting February 7, 2006

The League respectfully requests that this commission consider the possibility of making the Independent Police Review Division a truly independent body, included in the city charter. It is time for Portland to institute a system of police oversight that will stand on its own, facilitate more accountability, and increase public trust.

The League has been involved the city's efforts to make Portland's police bureau more accountable and responsive to the public since the infamous "Possum Caper of 1980." League representatives have served on two long-term study groups. The first was the Storrs Committee in the early 1980's, which resulted in the creation of the city's first system of police oversight, PIIAC.

Five years ago we participated in a large committee, appointed by Mayor Katz, whose charge was to recommend improvements to PIIAC. The committee issued majority and minority reports. The League supported the majority report that called for an independent system of police oversight that, among other things, would conduct its own investigations of police misconduct. City Council eventually adopted the system we have today, one that relies on police internal affairs to conduct those investigations.

Since the current system's inception, the League has attended Citizen Review Committee meetings on a regular basis. In our view the committee's ability to bring positive change to the police bureau has been hampered by its lack of independence and by IPR staff efforts to limit its authority. Over time, the committee has spent more and more of its time creating internal procedures and protocols, and interacting less and less with the public.

Considering the importance of public trust in its police force, we recommend that you focus your attention on this issue and explore the merits of including an independent agency devoted to police oversight in the charter.