



The League of Women Voters of Portland

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TO: Honorable District Judge Michael Simon

FROM: Debbie Kaye, president
Debbie Aiona, Action Committee chair

RE: Status Conference: United States of America v.
City of Portland Case No. 3:12-cv-02265-SI

The League of Women Voters of Portland has actively monitored the city's police bureau for decades, with a focus on public participation, transparency, policy development, and accountability. We regularly attend Portland Committee on Citizen-Engaged Policing (PCCEP) meetings and appreciate the committee's focus on issues of importance to the community. The monthly meetings provide a place where the public can learn, offer input, and access key Portland Police Bureau (PPB) members and city staff.

We recognize that the Compliance Officer and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) have found the city to be in substantial compliance with the Settlement Agreement, therefore it is highly likely that this will be the last year they will be providing oversight of our police bureau.

This reality leaves us with questions, concerns, and suggestions.

- The PCCEP and public benefit from the presence and participation of key police bureau leaders and city staff at the monthly meetings. They also benefit from hearing the committee's and public's concerns and ideas for improvement. We appreciate the Mayor's stated commitment to maintain and support the PCCEP over the long term, but wonder if PPB and city staff will continue to participate once the DOJ is out of the picture.

- The League thinks the PPB and community would benefit from a continuation of the oversight function in a different form. We suggest that the city consider creating a compliance officer position based in the PCCEP office. This individual could provide analysis and oversight, recommend improvements, and, with its base in the PCCEP office, have a close connection to the public.

- The years of consistent involvement from the Compliance Officer and DOJ have been extremely valuable. They brought a level of transparency, public interaction, and critical behind-the-scenes oversight never seen before. We would like to know how the PPB and city plan to follow up on that progress and work towards the transformation the public desires.

To promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government.

- As indicated by the substantial compliance ratings from the DOJ and Compliance Officer, the Settlement Agreement resulted in improved training, new systems to track data and progress, and updated policies. Many community members expected that DOJ oversight and involvement would lead to a transformation of the Portland Police Bureau. Although some progress has been made, more needs to be done. As an example, the Bureau tracks and regularly reports on evidence of the disparate treatment of communities of color. Thanks in part to the DOJ presence, we have more information about the problem, but have yet to see a plan to remedy it.
- There is general agreement that the PCCEP would benefit from greater public participation in its meetings. As a first step, current staff or a new hire with outreach experience could identify community organizations in the area where monthly meetings are planned and encourage them to share information about the PCCEP with their members and constituents.
- The Compliance Officer and DOJ did not devote a lot of attention to the Independent Police Review's Citizen Review Committee (CRC). It is a critical safeguard for community members experiencing possible police misconduct. Regular observers, including the League, have become increasingly concerned about its ability to function effectively. Recently, two well-respected members, including the chair, resigned in frustration. The League believes the CRC is key to the success of our civilian oversight system and deserves to have the city address its concerns.
- The Community Engagement section of the agreement requires the bureau to present its annual report in each of the three precincts and before City Council. One of our League members joined a handful of community members at the East Precinct meeting. The commander provided highlights specific to that precinct and responded to questions. In our view, this was a missed opportunity.

Bureau leaders should use the annual report to describe accomplishments and challenges, evaluate performance, share plans for the future, and most importantly, hear from the public. Because public testimony on reports is generally not allowed at City Council, the precinct meetings are the public's only avenue for responding to this report.

The League believes engaged community discussions are crucial for a functioning democracy and an accountable police bureau. Unless the public receives better notice of the precinct meetings, the presentations are improved to include a citywide overview, and incorporate opportunity for community feedback, we do not see how the city can be found in compliance with this paragraph.

The League's questions, concerns, and suggestions are a strong indication of our apprehension over what to expect once the DOJ and Compliance Officer are no longer monitoring and offering guidance to the PPB. We believe creation of a position for a locally-based compliance officer located in the PCCEP office would provide some level of reassurance that the transformation initiated by the Settlement Agreement may someday be realized.