



The League of Women Voters of Portland

618 NW Glisan Street, Suite 303, Portland, OR 97209

503-228-1675 • info@lwvpdx.org • www.lwvpdx.org

Board of Directors July 28, 2020

Debbie Kaye
President

Marion McNamara
1st Vice President

Chris Cobey
2nd VP

Nancy Donovan
3rd VP

Don Brenneis
Treasurer

Anne Davidson
Secretary

Debbie Aiona

Carolyn Buppert

Judy Froemke

Linda Mantel

Amber Nobe

Margaret Noel

*Audrey Zunkel-
deCoursey*

Off Board Leaders

Adrienne Aiona
Budget

Amy Beltaine
Social Media

Peggy Bengry
Vote411

Doreen Binder
Nominating

Joshua Buck
Social Media

Kathy Casto
Linda Fields
Voters' Guide

Mary McWilliams
Membership

Philip Thor
Endowment Fund

To: Mayor Ted Wheeler
Commissioners Chloe Eudaly, Amanda Fritz, and
Jo Ann Hardesty

From: League of Women Voters of Portland
Debbie Kaye, president
Debbie Aiona, Action Committee chair

Re: Proposed Charter Amendment: Police Accountability System

Mayor Wheeler and members of the Council:

The League of Women Voters of Portland has been involved in police oversight since the early 1980s when one of our past presidents served on the commission that proposed the city's first oversight system. To this day, League members regularly attend Citizen Review Committee (CRC) meetings and monitor the Independent Police Review (IPR).

The League supports the basic elements of a redesigned oversight system outlined in Commissioner Hardesty's proposed charter amendment. Although we recognize that it will take more than a charter change, this proposal has the potential to bring us much closer to the type of system envisioned by the majority of Mayor Katz's workgroup in 2000. That workgroup called for an independent civilian agency guided by a community board with the power to investigate complaints of police misconduct, compel officer testimony, and make policy recommendations to the police bureau and city council.

As long time observers of the CRC, a volunteer committee appointed by city council, we want to retain the strongest elements of our existing system. For example, the CRC hears appeals from civilians and police officers who disagree with command staff findings in misconduct cases. These hearings are open to the public and accept public comment before the CRC votes. We have observed that even when the CRC does not decide in the appellant's favor, appellants often express their appreciation for the opportunity to have their fellow community members consider their case. Furthermore, these hearings give the public a window into the inner workings of the police bureau and the city's accountability system.

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

If voters adopt this amendment, the League strongly recommends that the commission responsible for working out the details be encouraged to incorporate and build upon the positive aspects of our current system. IPR's effectiveness has been hamstrung by limitations built into city code, the union contract, and state law. In spite of those limitations it carries out independent investigations in certain misconduct cases, recommends findings, and engages in policy reviews.

The commission also should be asked to consider whether the transition to our next oversight system would be smoother if current staff and the CRC volunteers were able to transition into the new system. The city of Oakland adopted an entirely new oversight system that has been plagued by the growing pains sometimes associated with a new way of doing things. (www.oaklandauditor.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20200601_Performance-Audit_Police-Commission-CPRA_FINAL-REPORT.pdf) Portland may be able to avoid some of those pitfalls by tapping into the successful elements of our current system, moving us closer to the empowered and independent system the community has been seeking for years. Finally, we encourage city council and the commission to engage the community in designing the implementation plan as there are many important specifics not explicitly addressed in the charter language that will be crucial to the success of the proposed oversight board.

The League thanks Commissioner Hardesty for her leadership and urges city council to support the proposal.