



The League of Women Voters of Portland

PO Box 3491, Portland, Oregon 97208-3491

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

ADVOCACY POSITION STATEMENT, JUNE 2021

PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU: OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Introduction

The League of Women Voters of Portland believes that a safe, just, and equitable public safety system in Portland requires that the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) meet the following goals:

- Accountability for police officers who violate community standards and PPB policies and directives.
- Reduction in the use of force.
- Fair, equitable, and respectful treatment of community members.
- Reduction of bias-based policing with a goal of eliminating it.

Improving Police Bureau Culture

Changing the culture within the PPB must be a key goal of the bureau leadership. The PPB must end practices that systematically place police in opposition to or in domination of the public, or that treat community members as enemies. Officers should see themselves in partnership with the community in solving problems and should show respect for all individuals and cultures.

Improving the culture within the PPB should include: officer education in best practices used successfully elsewhere, public involvement, and positive community relations.

Portland Police Bureau policies should require officers to:

- Interact with community members in a professional and courteous manner.
- Consistently show respect for all individuals including those suspected of criminal behavior, experiencing a mental health crisis or causing a public safety concern.

The League supports strengthening when necessary and consistently enforcing PPB policies that apply to interactions with the public and co-workers.

Addressing Bias-Based Policing

We define bias-based policing as taking harmful actions based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic or housing status, mental or physical ability, or against other groups protected by law or policy. To prevent and reduce bias-based policing with the goal of elimination, PPB should provide ongoing, meaningful anti-bias training at all levels of the organization. The training should be regularly and thoroughly evaluated for its effectiveness in promoting respectful communication and improved understanding of the communities being policed.

PPB should prohibit the use of racial slurs and derogatory bias-based comments by officers while in public and in the workplace. PPB directives prohibiting such language must be supported by every level of the organization, be consistently enforced, and met with appropriate disciplinary actions.

PPB policies and discipline guidelines should include consequences up to and including termination for any officer who has regular or continuous association with groups that are engaged in organized efforts advocating criminal behavior against individuals and groups in the community, including, but not limited to: race, religion, gender, and national origin.

Reducing Use of Force

Use of excessive force by police not only harms individuals, but seriously erodes community trust. The PPB should set explicit goals to reduce the severity of force used by officers. Techniques such as de-escalation, exhausting other methods before deploying force, and using the least force necessary should be employed to achieve this goal.

The PPB should track its progress by keeping consistent records on the severity and frequency of its use of force. They should make periodic reports that are easily accessible to the public and clearly outline current trends.

Investing in Alternatives

The city and PPB should invest in programs that assign some duties currently held by bureau members to unarmed, appropriately trained civilian employees. For example, non-sworn personnel with suitable experience and proper preparation can handle administrative tasks or interactions with people in crisis, with mental health issues, or urban camping complaints effectively.

Enhancing Transparency

The public interest should determine the scope and timeliness of releasing records or information. Whether such information demonstrates an error or misconduct or embarrasses an officer should not be a deciding factor in whether to disclose information to the public.

Strengthening Civilian Oversight and Community Involvement

Civilian oversight of police should include an accountability system with the following powers:

- Authority to conduct independent investigations of police misconduct, including cases of deadly force.
- Power to subpoena witnesses and other evidence.
- Authority to compel statements from officers and witnesses.
- Meaningful role in determining findings and administering appropriate discipline in misconduct cases.
- Authority to recommend policy changes to the PPB with Portland City Council having the final say in adoption.
- Authority to use its independent judgment when weighing evidence and determining or recommending findings and discipline in misconduct cases. The oversight board's standard of review should not give deference to PPB's internal determinations.

To function effectively, the accountability system must have sufficient public funding to conduct thorough investigations, maintain adequate staffing, and support a community board.

Just and effective enforcement of the law requires good police-community relations. We support meaningful community involvement in the functioning of the PPB including, but not limited to, police oversight boards, budget advisory committees, and both limited duration and standing advisory committees.