



# League of Women Voters of Portland

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November 8, 2021

To: Mayor Ted Wheeler  
Commissioners Hardesty, Mapps, Rubio, and Ryan  
Chief Chuck Lovell

From: League of Women Voters of Portland  
Debbie Kaye, president  
James Ofsink, chair, LWV Justice Interest Group

Mayor Wheeler, Commissioners Hardesty, Mapps, Rubio, Ryan, and  
Chief Lovell:

The League of Women Voters of Portland (League) supports the Public Safety Support Specialist program and encourages its ongoing operation and expansion. In particular, we recommend that a portion of the extra funds available through the fall budget adjustment process be used to purchase vehicles and other equipment sufficient to support the newly hired Support Specialists and the already funded positions.

This summer the League board adopted an advocacy position statement as a follow up to last year's study of Oversight and Accountability in the Portland Police Bureau. One section of that statement reads: ***"The city and the PPB should invest in programs that assign some duties currently held by bureau members to unarmed, appropriately trained civilian employees."***

Both Mayor Wheeler and Chief Lovell have identified staffing shortages as a major challenge for the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) resulting from a high number of retirements and resignations. To address the situation, the city and PPB will need to use a variety of strategies. Using trained personnel such as the Support Specialists to carry out duties that do not require a sworn officer is one way to reduce officer workload and allow them to focus on the calls where their skills and training are most needed.

So far the Public Safety Support Specialist program as outlined in Directive 350.26 appears to be going well. Support Specialists are authorized to do a variety of tasks that, while essential, do not need the presence of an armed officer.

Both Lt. Brian Hughes, who supervises the Support Specialist program in the Central Precinct, and Sam Diaz from the mayor's office have called attention to the

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

cost of purchasing specialized vans, new uniforms, and other equipment as one barrier to expanding the Support Specialist program. Because their training time is shorter and their salaries are lower than sworn officers, the overall expense is smaller. This is a cost-effective way to free our sworn officers to focus on duties better suited to their level of expertise and training. It also demonstrates that PPB leadership recognizes the stress officers are experiencing and is taking steps to provide assistance.

Because unexpected funds have become available, the League urges you to take this opportunity to purchase vehicles and needed equipment so that the Public Safety Support Specialist Program can be expanded in an orderly manner.

We understand that improving public safety is complex and that there are few simple solutions. Thank you for this opportunity to share our recommendations.

Sincerely,

League of Women Voters of Portland

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debbie Kaye".

Debbie Kaye,  
President

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James Ofsink".

James Ofsink,  
Chair, Justice Interest Group