



League of Women Voters of Portland

PO Box 3491, Portland, Oregon 97208-3491

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

Date: August 7, 2023

To: Mayor Ted Wheeler, Commissioners Gonzalez, Mapps, Rubio, and Ryan

Re: Police Accountability Commission

The League of Women Voters of Portland (the “League”) began studying policing in Portland in the 1960s and has been engaged in issues related to law enforcement and police oversight since that time. In the ensuing decades, the League has had a role in the creation, advocacy, and monitoring of effective civilian oversight of police.

Based on League study and policy positions, we endorsed Ballot Measure 26-217 in November 2020, joining the vast majority of Portland voters in supporting the reforms outlined in the charter amendment.

At two recent City Council sessions (May 17 and May 23), city commissioners expressed doubts about the Police Accountability Commission’s (PAC) approach to charter amendment implementation, which raised concerns within the League and prompted us to send this letter. In the end, we may not agree with every aspect of the PAC’s final proposal, however, we do support the direction it is headed. The PAC has carefully followed the charter amendment’s provisions and City Council direction, incorporated effective and promising practices from other jurisdictions, and relied on research and reports produced by the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement and the U.S. DOJ¹.

Our support is based on League study and years of involvement in the issue. In 2021, we completed a publication titled, *Portland Police Bureau: Oversight and Accountability* and adopted a new policy position, including the following section on civilian oversight of police:

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.**

¹ <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/RIC/Publications/cops-w0951-pub.pdf>.

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.

We urge you to follow the will of the voters, heed the study and advocacy of the League, honor the PAC's careful research and deliberative process, and offer your support for their proposal when it comes before you this fall. As it has for many decades now, the League will continue to monitor and encourage the City's support of effective civilian oversight of the police².

Sincerely,



Carolyn Buppert, President
League of Women Voters of Portland



James Ofsink, Chair
Justice Interest Group

² While one of the League's members serves on the PAC, that member had no role in writing this letter.