



May 13, 2021

The Elephant in the Room

We need to talk about the elephant in the room: gun violence. We are on the precipice of a gang war; I've seen this before in the '90s here in Portland and it's back in full force. Our elected leaders can no longer turn a blind eye and blame it on the pandemic. The surge in gun violence is directly related to the defunding of police—the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) is catastrophically understaffed, our specialty units have been disbanded, and our response time to calls for service has understandably increased.

In the past 24 hours, there have been 8 instances of gunfire on the streets of our City, and 3 people were shot. Tragically one person was killed, and two others are in the hospital with life-threatening injuries; each victim is a person of color.

Those shootings come on the heels of over 350 shootings so far this year, and nearly 900 shootings last year. Often these violent crimes are happening in broad daylight—indiscriminate violence with hundreds and hundreds of bullets in our neighborhoods.

City Council prides itself on prioritizing social justice and racial equity. Yet, just this year, over 65% of the victims of gun violence are BIPOC. Where is justice and equity for the victims and their families?

For a City Council that claims to be data-driven, they only use data when it serves their political agendas. The increase in gun violence is directly related to the loss of the Gun Violence Reduction Team (GVRT). To ignore this data and continue to shift blame is unacceptable. The GVRT proactively policed with a holistic approach, building partnerships and relationships to get illegal guns off the street. It's obvious to everyone except for City Council that more guns and increased gang activity mean more violence.

On top of that, City Council is now focused on cutting the Police Bureau's budget, which would be the only City Bureau to face any meaningful cut in this budget cycle, and on adding millions to various social services. That won't solve the gun violence epidemic in the City.

The answer is that our community deserves a fully staffed police force with a minimum of 1,000 officers and a full budget commitment to addressing gun violence, AND our community deserves adequate social service resources. Forcing us to choose one over the other is short-sighted. Social services and alternatives resources are not a replacement for police officers and common-sense public safety infrastructure.

Right now, our community has a sense of hopelessness. They have resigned themselves to the fact that things will get worse, not better. Residents are moving out of the City, businesses are being forced to relocate, and good, hard-working police officers are leaving the Bureau to work for other agencies. To change course, City Council should fully fund and fully staff the Police Bureau and bring back the specialty units that protect and serve our communities.

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