April 25, 2017

**MEMORANDUM TO MAYOR TED WHEELER**

**Re: Establishment of the Portland Police Youth Advisory Council**

The disconnect between youth in Portland and the Portland Police Bureau is well documented and has been a proximal factor in a steady stream of community versus police issues over the past two decades. Your commitment to improving police/community relations is notable, but initiatives outside of the current construct of the Portland Police Bureau are needed in order to achieve your vision.

This memo will describe the current organization of the Portland Police Bureau and its relationship with local youth, detailing how the current structure fails to facilitate youth voice. It will then review initiatives for promoting dialogue between young people and police in other cities around the United States, looking to identify successful programs. Finally, it will provide a specific proposal for the establishment of the Portland Police Bureau Youth Advisory Council.

**The City of Portland and Portland Police Bureau Fail to Facilitate Youth Voice on Police Issues**

In many ways the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) has become “state of the art” in terms of its community outreach initiatives. In fact, the degree to which the structure of the PPB facilitates input from myriad community groups and perspectives stands in sharp contrast to the absence of youth voice.

Many of the improvements in PPB interactivity with the community were in response to a Department of Justice consent decree under which the PPB agreed to a variety of changes, including hiring a more diverse force of police officers, improving training, and seeking diverse points-of-view from the community. For example, in the first two years operating under the consent decree, 41% of newly-hired PPB officers represented communities of color.[[1]](#footnote-1) Several advisory committees were established that included community members and a range of police officers, ranging from supervisors to patrol officers. Among the groups are an African-American Advisory Council, a Slavic Advisory Council, a Muslim Advisory Council, and the Alliance For Safer Communities (formerly the Sexual Minority Roundtable).[[2]](#footnote-2) In addition, a Training Advisory Council aimed at addressing key training needs was also formed that included 27 community members.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The federal judge who oversees the consent decree examined the initiatives launched in the 2012-14 time period and confirmed that they addressed the critical issues related to the treatment of people with mental health issues and it was expected that the reforms would have an ameliorative impact on the overall relationship between the PPB and the Portland Community, particularly people of color.[[4]](#footnote-4) The judge also ordered PPB to issue yearly update reports on its initiatives.[[5]](#footnote-5) Finally, the judge ordered the creation of a community panel to oversee the progress of the federally mandated Portland police reforms – the Community Oversight Advisory Board. Led by retired Oregon Chief Justice Paul DeMuniz, the Board includes 25 local citizens, all adults.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Glaring in its omission from the initiatives launched in response to the consent decree is any formal means of young people advising police on the youth perspective. The PPB lists a plethora of “outreach efforts” on its website, including the African-American and Muslim councils listed above as well social events organized by the department (All Star Fan Fest), volunteering at the Blazer’s Boys and Girls Club, bike rodeos, an outing to a summer camp, a program entitled Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT), living room dialogues with the Latino, Somali, and Hmong communities, coaching youth sports teams, and “Shop With A Cop.” There is even something called “Youth Forums – Making Positive Changes,” where the PPB, Lloyd Mall Security, and Tri-Met facilitate meetings with middle and high school students. The problem with all of these is that the communications are designed to be one-way, from the police officers involved to the young people taking part. Any feedback from the youth perspective would only be incidental to the process.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Another potential source of youth perspectives on police issues could come through the Office of Youth Violence Prevention (OYVP), which was launched in 2006 and tasked with promoting public safety by focusing on the root causes of problems in neighborhoods instead of merely spending resources on adding police officers.[[8]](#footnote-8) The OYVP Director, Antoinette Edwards, and OYVP Policy Manager, Tom Peavey, have been tireless advocates for bridging community divides, especially between key community groups and the PPB. Among their initiatives is the Community Peace Collaborative, which calls itself “a coalition for violence prevention and achievement.”[[9]](#footnote-9) The OYVP convenes bi-weekly meetings in conjunction with the PPB and the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice Services. A wide range of organizations and agencies are represented at the Peace Collaborative meetings, including federal and local law enforcement, state and county juvenile and adult justice authorities, relevant city bureaus, crime prevention and security organizations, housing organizations, education/training organizations, business leaders, faith communities, neighborhood coalitions, civic organizations, and health and social service organizations. The meetings of the Peace Collaborative are warm, inclusive, and evince a shared sense of mission – to reduce violence in all its forms in the community. While extremely welcoming of youth visitors, the OYVP and Community Peace Collaborative provide no formal means of including the youth perspective in their work.

One organization that could serve as a conduit for the youth perspective is the Multnomah Youth Commission (MYC), the official youth policy body for both Multnomah County and the City of Portland. A group of 25 young people from age 13-21, it is housed within the Multnomah County Chair’s Office of Diversity and Equity and the City of Portland’s Office of Neighborhood Involvement. The MYC intends to be the youth voice on change affecting young people and also seeks to impact community perception about youth. A review of the MYC’s activities over the past several years reveals that it focuses on three primary policy areas: (1) Education – both detailing MYC members to work with local educational officials and organizing youth voter forums; (2) Sustainability – looking for ways to help teens live more sustainable lives, including facilitating use of public transportation; and (3) Violence – focusing on anti-gay violence, cyberbullying, gang violence, police violence, and home violence.[[10]](#footnote-10) While admirable, the work of the MYC is only remotely tied to any efforts to give youth voice on police issues.

**Initiatives in Other Cities Promote Youth/Police Dialogue**

While many cities are like Portland and organize youth commissions to speak with city officials about many issues, a growing number have established youth advisory councils narrowly focused on police issues. The non-police-focused youth advisory boards are ubiquitous, particularly in the Portland area. In Beaverton, for example, the 20-person Mayor’s Youth Advisory Board (MYAB) consists of 20 members selected for two-year terms by the Mayor. Established in 2000, the group meets bi-monthly and “provides a voice for youth in decisions and policies of the city.”[[11]](#footnote-11) The MYAB is one of several such youth bodies in Oregon, including the aforementioned Multnomah Youth Commission and similar organizations in Hillsboro, Tualatin, Redmond, La Pine, Gresham, Boardman, and Happy Valley. As with the Beaverton group, these organizations offer a youth perspective on an ongoing basis, and the description of their activities in a 2014 report makes no mention of any of the groups working with police organizations.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In contrast, cities across America have launched youth advisory committees specifically focused on giving local police officials and city governments the youth perspective on police-related issues. Below is a sampling of these organizations:

* Ripon, California Youth Police Advisory Committee (YPAC). Formed in 2013 by the Chief of Police, who believed that “teenagers are often overlooked as a source of insightful input regarding youth and law enforcement issues,” the YPAC meets nine times a year to provide advice to the Chief of Police with the aim of influencing policies, procedures, and programs to better serve young people. The YPAC consists of high school juniors and seniors and aims to be broadly representative of the local high school population.[[13]](#footnote-13)
* Washington, DC Metropolitan Police Department Youth Advisory Council (YAC). Formed in 2002, the YAC aims to create a program that would include area youth in community policing and the problem solving process. In addition to the monthly meetings of the YAC, which take place during school hours, YAC members are offered the chance for ride-alongs or follow-up meetings with particular police department divisions. Different from other advisory councils, the YAC also seeks to expose local youth to policing as a career option.[[14]](#footnote-14) In their book, Community Policing: Partnerships for Problem Solving, authors Linda Miller, Karen Hess, and Christina Orthmann identify programs like the YAC as crucial to changing the dynamic of inner-city policing.[[15]](#footnote-15)
* Winthrop, Massachusetts Chief of Police Youth Advisory Committee (YAC). Located in a smaller town, the YAC draws all of its participants from Winthrop High School. The YAC is a student-driven committee with a goal of recommending measures for addressing youth concerns and needs directly to the Police Department. The Police Department considers the YAC as important to insuring that they are “better informed about the younger generation in the community.”[[16]](#footnote-16)
* Allentown, Pennsylvania Chief’s Youth Advisory Panel. The Youth Advisory Panel was created by the Chief of Police and intends to give high school students “direct access” to Allentown police officers. The charter of the group specifically calls out the “no holds barred” nature of the exchanges between the Panel and the officers and credits the dialogue with fostering “honesty, respect, and trust.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Interestingly, the Youth Advisory Panel is one of many community programs of the Allentown Police Department, which has a range of programs similar to those in Portland.
* Houston, Texas Youth Police Advisory Council (YPAC). Created in 1997 by the Chief of Police, its founder believed that “teenagers are often overlooked as a source of insightful input regarding youth and law enforcement issues.” The YPAC was the nation’s first such organization and was used as a model by many other police departments. Fifty local students are chosen yearly to serve on the council, which meets five times during the school year. The YPAC is charged with advising the Chief of Police on issues of importance to youth, looking for common ground with the police on key issues, and informing youth about the police outlook on important matters.[[18]](#footnote-18)

While these and other youth advisory panels differ in size, number of meetings held per year, and their ultimate impact, their continuing existence underscores the importance of the organizations as viewed by local officials. Not knowing the exact circumstances of police/community relations in the cities above, it is difficult to reach conclusions as to whether ongoing dialogue between young people and police has been helpful in diffusing potentially volatile situations or improving the relationships overall, but it is difficult to imagine that the youth panels have made matters worse.

**Proposal to Establish the Portland Police Bureau Youth Advisory Council**

Based on the review of existing organizations in Portland and the clear lack of direct youth voice on police issues, I have concluded that the establishment of a Portland Police Bureau Youth Advisory Council would be in the best interest of the city. Note that this could also be named the “Mayor’s Youth Advisory Council on Police.” The Portland Police Bureau Youth Advisory Council would operate as follows:

* It would consist of twenty (20) members drawn from local high schools.
* It would meet ten (10) times per year for two hours.
* While the Mayor and Chief of Police would be welcome to attend all meetings, the Youth Advisory Council would set its own agenda and request the attendance of specific police officials at each meeting.
* Looking to adopt best practices from existing Youth Advisory Council groups across the country, the organization would identify key issues, develop proposed policies, comment on City or Police Bureau proposals, and create action plans for diffusing crisis situations.
* The Council should be adequately funded so that it can liaise with other councils and panels across the country and attend, where meaningful, relevant conferences.

**Conclusion**

Portland is but one incident away from a potential nasty conflagration between young people and police officers. While the city has worked hard to implement the DOJ consent decree, the lack of youth input on critical issues relating to policing represents an accident waiting to happen for the city.

The proposal above to establish a Portland Police Bureau Youth Advisory Council and the recent Portland-based initiative, Youth Educating Police, represent a statement by Portland young people that they wish to become part of a solution, not remain part of the problem. We urge you to embrace these initiatives and move Portland to the “top of the class” in terms of its efforts to improve police/community relations.

1. Portland Police Bureau, Department of Justice Progress Report (March 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/30476 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2014/08/groundbreaking\_settlement\_on\_p.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2015/01/twenty\_people\_selected\_to\_serv.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/30379 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. http://www.portlandonline.com/safeyouth/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. http://www.portlandonline.com/safeyouth/index.cfm?c=49739 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://multco.us/multnomah-youth-commission [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. http://www.beavertonoregon.gov/289/Mayors-Youth-Advisory-Board [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. http://www.orcities.org/Portals/17/A-Z/EmpoweringYouthMay2014LF.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. http://www.riponpd.org/?page\_id=1784 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/youth-advisory-council-yac [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Miller, Hess, & Orthmann, Community Policing: Partnerships for Problem Solving, page 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. http://www.town.winthrop.ma.us/sites/winthropma/files/uploads/youth\_advisory\_board\_press\_realease.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. http://www.allentownpa.gov/Police/Divisions-and-Units/Youth-Division [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. http://www.houstontx.gov/police/vip/ypac.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-18)