

Statement re: damage at Multnomah Building
8/20/2020

I was very concerned to hear about the events of Tuesday night, when a small group of people broke windows at the Multnomah Building -- the County headquarters -- and lit fires inside the Office of Community Involvement, which engages our diverse communities in the work of the County.

The protests have been an incredible driver of change. Out of them have come specific actions on budgets, legislative action on police accountability, and Reimagine Oregon -- a broad policy agenda that has been developed by Black community members and state and local electeds.

I've made clear my support for the protests, including by attending them and by speaking out against police violence toward protesters. In speaking out against police violence, I have noted that some people have engaged in dangerous activity, which I do not in any way condone and have called to end; but have focussed on police violence as a broader systemic problem.

In the past week or so, however, there seems to have been an escalation in violent and destructive behavior by some people on the streets. This includes the events of Tuesday night as well as the personal assaults that took place this weekend.

I understand the rage and frustration people are feeling right now -- about centuries of profound racial injustice; and also about the present, about COVID, about economic injustice and fear and uncertainty. I understand that rage and frustration can express themselves in all kinds of ways. I believe that these expressions of rage and frustration are evidence of systemic failures in our society.

The escalation of destructive behavior, and of personal violence, however, is dangerous. It's detracting from the work. It's demanding resources -- funds and energy -- that would be better spent elsewhere. And I'm concerned that it will erode public support for the movement and for the change that people protesting are demanding and that we want to see. The protesters, and the Black Lives Matter movement, have accomplished so much; but so much more needs to be done. Let's keep our focus on that work.

Susheela Jayapal
Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2