



An Open Letter to the Community

On behalf of Multnomah County, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, Local Public Safety Coordinating Council, Multnomah County District Attorney's office, Portland Police Bureau, Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, Gresham Police Department, and the Inter-Faith Peace and Action Collaborative, we share a sense of urgency regarding gun violence on our streets. Words cannot adequately describe the immeasurable toll gun violence exacts on families and our community. As of March 8, 2021 there have been 278 shootings in the Portland region; 58 injury shootings, and 17 gun-related homicides.

Gun violence rates continued to increase amid the City of Portland's proactive response to community demands to invest and reexamine historic approaches to gun violence. As public officials, it is our responsibility to work in partnership with the community to galvanize every possible resource to prevent, intervene, investigate, and suppress gun violence.

The surge in incidents and deaths demands that we respond immediately and that we remain united in our effort to hear and serve our community and prevent future violence by investing in those most impacted: young men who are disproportionately Black and Brown. These are the same people who are disproportionately impacted by the economic suffering and health impacts created by the COVID-19 pandemic. They are the same people impacted by systemic racism and trauma that's rooted in Oregon's history. Without intervention, the combination of these systemic and current stresses causes increased gang violence, domestic violence, inflames disputes, and leads directly to increasing violence.

Shootings create trauma for the people directly involved and for everyone in surrounding neighborhoods and communities. The sounds of gunfire; the possibility that kids or loved ones may be unintended victims; and, the inability to feel safe can cause long-term harm. The risk of and reality of that harm calls us to action.

We want to be clear. We see what others see; too many people being shot and killed in our community. We are deeply impacted by the loss of life and the trauma plaguing our community. Immediate action is needed.

We also want to openly acknowledge and express regret for past mistakes and the historical inequities and racism surrounding public safety and health for BIPOC communities. We must invest in and reimagine public health and safety. The needs and voices of those disproportionately impacted by gun violence must be prioritized. We are committed to listening, learning, and evolving the entire public safety system and doing what it takes to build trust with the community.

We understand that community and family violence are complex issues that require a public health approach. This holistic approach includes prevention, deterrence, intervention, and accountability. For these reasons, we are taking immediate steps to address gun violence holistically and engaging immediately in a renewed collaborative regional approach among agencies, community groups, non-profits, faith leaders, activists, and elected officials. Highlights of our immediate, evidence-based, best practices response that:

- Aligns community-wide resources and commitments;
- Identifies those impacted or potentially impacted by gun violence;
- Ensures trained, community-based outreach workers contact those individuals, their families, and associates;
- Offers those impacted by gun violence the support and services they need;
- Helps law enforcement and the courts hold people who engage in illegal acts accountable and,
- Integrates community awareness, input, and direct participation in a collaborative way.

Our immediate action steps include, among other strategies:

- Increasing our investment in non-law enforcement work essential to our evidence-based, public-health approach.
- Partnering with public health officials, non-profit organizations, the faith community, and others to engage people at risk of gun violence and people who are victims. For example, Portland's Office of Violence Prevention's Healing Hurt People program, a hospital-based trauma response team, is interested in expanding services into Oregon Health and Science University. As a result, the program soon will be in both of Portland's level 1 trauma hospitals. OVP also is working to find more resources to support emergency relocations for victims of gun violence and their families.
- Focusing on upstream prevention and diversion efforts that provide necessary support for community members. For example, by working in potentially high-risk locations and with victims of domestic violence and people leaving incarceration. The Office of Violence Prevention's Portland Restoration Academy recently added three new interns, each of whom was formerly incarcerated, to help men and women transitioning from incarceration back to the community.
- Multnomah County's Department of Community Justice (DCJ), which oversees parole and probation, juvenile detention, juvenile services and pretrial services will continue to coordinate internally as well as collaborate with external criminal justice partners and community organizations to intervene and provide support to adults, families and youth impacted by gun violence and retaliatory gang activity. Multnomah County is also committed to the continued deployment of resources through the County's Health Department and Department of Human Service to strengthen services for people impacted by gun violence with behavioral health, food security and SUN Community Schools support. We recognize that gun violence impacts our entire community and we are committed to holistic solutions.
- Conducting weekly shooting reviews. Law enforcement agencies are sharing detailed information about shootings and leveraging their collective resources more effectively as a result. Just as important, the information shared in shooting reviews helps reduce the risk of retaliation and is the foundation for successful prevention and intervention.

- Providing additional resources for prevention, engagement, investigation, and accountability. There will be more officers on-call to respond to shootings. The Portland Police Bureau also is working to increase its administrative and analytical support for officers on the street. Local law enforcement is collaborating with state and federal officials to ensure every law enforcement agency is working together – across city, county, and state lines – to investigate, arrest and hold people who engage in gun violence accountable.

We are individually and collectively committed to working together despite our differences and diverse roles and responsibilities. We are united in our commitment to reducing gun violence, acknowledging the harm being done to people and families, and ensuring an ongoing focus on action and constant improvement in how we implement our strategies. We are building long-term reform and system change to create an effective and sustainable strategy to address this public safety and health crisis.

Finally, we recognize actions speak louder than words. We all share a sense of urgency. We know unity and collaboration begin with us as we work together and in partnership with the communities we serve. We are committed to working together, supporting each other, including our policing professionals who work to keep our communities safe every day. Accountability is paramount as we work to reduce the devastation of gun violence. We are dedicated to transparency, giving voice to community members to ensure we are addressing trends that lead to disparities to build legitimacy and trust and to ensure the safety of our community. And, we know success will only be measured by reductions in gun violence.

That is our goal.