



Jessica Vega Pederson Multnomah County Commissioners

501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Suite 600
Portland, Oregon 97214
Phone: (503) 988-5217
Email: district3@multco.us

September 30, 2021

Dear Mayor Wheeler and City Commissioners,

I am writing to you today to express my strong support for Portland Fire & Rescue's 2021 Fall BMP request to expand the Portland Street Response (PSR) program to serve all of the City of Portland. As an elected representative of the area of Multnomah County which was served by PSR throughout its pilot period, I can attest to the positive impact it has had on Lents and the surrounding communities.

This program reflects our community's demands for alternatives to the traditional policing model. In its first nine months of operation as a pilot project in Lents, PSR has responded to more than 430 calls for assistance. Those calls have been answered by behavioral health experts trained in providing culturally-responsive services, as opposed to traditional law enforcement, resulting in safer interactions for everyone in instances in which PSR has been involved.

The expansion of PSR to cover all of Portland would be a critical step in our community's efforts to ensure public safety, and it would occur in the context of other significant investments being made by the City and Multnomah County in behavioral health and gun violence intervention programs. In this past year, Multnomah County has expanded our behavioral health programs with additional addiction and school-based mental health services, a new Black/African American mobile behavioral health team, and \$8 million in additional funding for our new downtown Behavioral Health Resource Center. We have also added three new homeless services navigation teams, and expanded our efforts to prevent gun violence with \$3.9 million in new funding for community violence prevention programs.

The need for PSR has never been greater across our community, as we grapple with the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented surge in gun violence, and a homelessness crisis that has resulted in thousands of individuals with mental health challenges living unsheltered on our streets. PSR is a critical tool in our response to these challenges. By expanding PSR to cover all of the City of Portland, police resources will be freed up to conduct important investigatory and

law enforcement work that is currently not taking place due to the high number of incidents that are tying up public safety resources.

As the City of Portland and Multnomah County expand our efforts to provide alternatives to policing and enhanced services for those in greatest need of support, a greater level of coordination will be required to ensure that programs engaged in similar areas of work are communicating with each other. We must also work to ensure that these various programs can be evaluated and measured to improve and strengthen their effectiveness. I am eager to work alongside all of you to develop strategies for coordinating our efforts.

Portland Street Response is a critical component of our community's response to the need for behavioral health services and alternatives to traditional policing. I urge you to expand it to cover all of the City of Portland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Vega Pederson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessica Vega Pederson
Multnomah County Commissioner, District 3