



September 26, 2023

Portland City Council
1221 SW 4th Ave
Portland, OR 97204

RE: Portland Street Response as a National Model

Dear Mayor Wheeler & members of the Portland City Council:

We write to you as fellow local elected officials from across the country to urge you to continue to support, invest in, and scale up Portland Street Response (PSR).

Municipalities across the country look to Portland Street Response as a national model and it is imperative that the program is fully supported. As leaders of [Local Progress](#) – a national network of local elected officials – we know how important it is to have fellow localities to look to, learn from, and build new realities with. We are so grateful to the work that Portland has done around community response programs and hope we can continue to learn from each other. Some of us have highlighted PSR in our [own efforts](#) to build community response programs in our own localities. We join the chorus of Portlanders, Portland-area elected officials, and businesses, non-profits, unions, and religious institutions [calling](#) for renewed support of the PSR program.

Last October, we were among the two dozen local elected officials, government staffers, and community partners who traveled to Portland to learn from Portland Street Response and identify best practices to inform our communities' work around alternative response programs. We had the opportunity to meet with key stakeholders involved in the creation and implementation of Portland Street Response, including Portland Fire & Rescue Chief Sara Boone, [Street Roots](#) Executive Director Kaia Sand, [Portland State University Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative](#) Co-founder Greg Townley, Director of the Bureau of Emergency Communications Bob Cozzie, and Portland Police Bureau Deputy Chief Mike Frome. Our group also toured PSR headquarters, as well as the 911 call center to understand how dispatchers transfer calls to PSR.

What we learned was impressive. The workers at PSR are highly trained first responders, providing compassionate, effective aid to people in need. They improve community safety, and offer an alternative to an armed police response that is not appropriate for every 911 call. They effectively de-escalate situations and provide medical care, improving health outcomes and saving lives. PSR also raises the bar for workers in the high-demand field of mental and behavioral health by offering living wage jobs to a traditionally undervalued workforce. And as

local leaders who believe in workers rights, we congratulate the Portland Street Response workers who recently unionized and signed their first tentative agreement.

Real safety is when people have everything they need to thrive — a place to live, a dignified job that provides economic security and access to opportunities, and the resources to care for themselves and their loved ones. For too long, we've relied solely on policing and punishment while at the same time underinvesting in public housing, infrastructure, schools, and healthcare — which has caused decades of harm in Black and Brown communities. It doesn't have to be this way. For decades, communities have been modeling and investing in ways that address root causes of harm and violence without criminalization and incarceration. Now, local governments across the country are pushing for and investing in these community-led strategies — like PSR — so their impacts can be widely felt. After observing the program's impact first-hand, we urge you to do the same.

National and [local](#) polling continue to show extremely strong support for expanding PSR and similar mobile community response teams. People across the country are rooting for the success of Portland Street Response. We hope the City of Portland will continue to champion PSR as a national model for an effective unarmed crisis response.

In solidarity,

Kendra Brooks, At-Large Council Member, Philadelphia City Council

Javiera Caballero, At-Large Council Member, Durham City Council

Tiffany Cabán, Council Member, District 22, New York City Council

Vanessa Fuentes, Council Member, District 2, Austin City Council

Eunisses Hernandez, Council Member, District 1, Los Angeles City Council

Mary Lupien, City Council Vice President, Rochester, NY City Council

Elliott Payne, Council Member, Ward 1, Minneapolis City Council

Rossana Rodriguez, Alderman, 33rd Ward, Chicago City Council

Gabriela Santiago-Romero, Council Member, District 6, Detroit City Council

Monica Wilson, Council Member, Antioch, CA City Council

Arti Walker-Peddakotla, Former Trustee, Village of Oak Park, IL