



Date: September 24, 2020

To: Portland City Council Members – Mayor Wheeler, Commissioner Eudaly, Commissioner Fritz, Commissioner Hardesty, Commissioner Ryan

From: Jason Brandt, President / CEO
Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association

Subject: Funding for Portland Police Bureau and Portland Street Response

Portland City Council Members,

The hospitality industry thrives on human interaction – face to face conversation. We love greeting tourists and locals in our city and showcasing our values – emphasis on homegrown, lovingly made goods and experiences, sustainability, and devotion to our outdoor spaces. Most importantly, we are welcoming to all people.

This has been ripped away from us by COVID-19. Not a single individual in the hospitality industry, whether business owner, server or housekeeper, hasn't felt the impact of this dramatic change in how we do business. Layoffs and closures have already happened and continue to loom on the horizon. Forty percent of Oregon restaurant operators say it is unlikely their restaurant will still be in business six months from now, if business conditions continue at current levels. Many Portland hotels are reporting occupancy rates for July, August, and September below 20 percent. Jobs at Portland hotels are unlikely to return without either a dramatic increase in occupancy or additional Congressional action.

There is enough for us to worry about from the threat of COVID-19 without having to worry about the elimination of our public safety services with it. We simply can't afford to defund our police. It's true – policing across the nation needs change and reform; police forces have a responsibility to be responsive to their communities. However, to create real change in doing business, as every hospitality business knows intimately from adapting to COVID-19, this requires more resources, not less. At the end of the day, when our employees or guests are in a dangerous situation, they still need someone to show up when they call. This hasn't been the case for a long time in our world as Portland Police Bureau, similar to other forces around the country, has had staffing challenges for years. Our community still needs public safety services desperately.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the issues we already had in Portland. There are hundreds of individuals on the street without homes. As the media has reported, meth has made an

enormous resurgence in our community over the past several years, and meth psychosis can make individuals struggling with addiction aggressive. As foot traffic has decreased downtown, our employees and guests become even more of a target for people experiencing this side effect. Additionally, the protests have resulted in more people openly carrying weapons downtown. For these reasons, we hear from people frequently that they no longer feel safe on the streets of Portland, particularly in our downtown core. This isn't the way our community should be.

We are hopeful for the new program Portland Street Response. We would like to see investment and expansion of this idea as soon as possible. We support solutions that will benefit the entire community and get resources and assistance to the people who need it. Portland Police Bureau will be able to dedicate more time responding to dangerous situations rather than unwanted persons calls.

In short, the hospitality industry and our entire community relies on public safety services and needs more investment in them, not less. We can reimagine the ways our City provides essential services, but we can't afford to eliminate a public service without a proven method of what to replace it with.

I ask you, please support funding for the Portland Police Bureau and for Portland Street Response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason Brandt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jason Brandt
President & CEO
Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association