PORTLAND FIRE & RESCUE

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Dr. Townley,

On behalf of my colleagues, Deputy Director Kezia Wanner and Chief Adjutant Aaron Johnson, thank you for the opportunity to be briefed on your Portland Street Response: Year Two Evaluation Report on May 22, 2023. We appreciate your perspective.

Regrettably the timing of your report's release precluded the inclusion of my findings as the interim Division Chief of Community Health, a role I assumed on March 27, 2023, after over two years in the role of Division Chief of Emergency Operations. As your report notes, Portland Street Response (PSR) to date has lacked the requisite structure to ensure compliance with City of Portland rules and procedures in service to its operational effectiveness and durability.

As Interim Division Chief of Community Health, and as the upcoming Interim Fire Chief of Portland Fire & Rescue (PF&R), thank you for the opportunity to share the following findings with you:

- PSR's launch and subsequent inception was led not by PF&R's leadership but directly by the office of former Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty. As a result, PSR has not always complied with bureau and City structure and operations.
- When Commissioner Gonzalez assumed office in January 2023, PSR program management moved from City Hall to PF&R.
- When I assumed management oversight on March 27, 2023, it became clear to me there were areas of liability and weakness. These include:
    - purchasing and distribution of supplies in violation of City policy;
    - impasse with organized labor;
    - staff actions in violation of bureau and city policies and practices;
    - widespread workplace culture issues at supervisor and field staff levels;
    - factions developing among employee groups;
    - lack of clarity regarding program goals;
    - lack of clear direction from division management; and
    - overall lack of structure.

- From this discovery process, the following actions were taken with program stabilization and alignment with City values and priorities in mind:
    - Hiring pause, with narrow exceptions possible for only critical positions, until program stabilization can be achieved;
    - Meetings with program management to understand future financial plans;
    - Establishing clear purchasing authority;
    - Aligning items purchased and distributed by PSR with program goals and bureau and City priorities;
    - Developing policies where none previously existed;
    - Developing operational procedures to ensure employees understand work performance and employee behavior expectations;
    - Correcting past purchasing errors with City Procurement and legal counsel;
    - Correcting employee performance issues to ensure employees' actions reflect the values, mission, and priorities of the bureau and the City; and
    - Evaluating effective management models for the program.

Regarding "Recommendation #1 – Continue to Address Staffing Issues that Impact Program Success."

In addition to programmatic and fiscal controls, expiring one-time funding (ARPA and Opioid Settlement funds) require development of a pathway for ongoing financial stability. In light of these challenges, it would be imprudent to hire additional staff at this time.

Regarding "Recommendation #2 – Continue to Provide More Structure and Support"

As noted, we agree. As the program grew rapidly under Commissioner Hardesty's Office, building out the necessary structure and support was overlooked. Again, the program stabilization work must be done before program expansion occurs and is currently being performed by a small group which is significantly under-resourced. The work to provide structure is ongoing and will take time.

Regarding "Recommendation #3 – Continue to Refine Call Criteria and Call Type"

This evaluative work is occurring throughout our community safety response system and is ongoing. It is important to note that we must and will engage all our labor partners as we work through the impacts of potential call reallocation strategies.

Regarding "Recommendation #4 – Continue to Prioritize Communication, Outreach, and Engagement"

We agree with the recommendation and this recommendation can be extended throughout our community safety response system. The challenge with this recommendation specific to PSR is there is significant and growing confusion and uncertainty within and outside the program about the "purpose and scope of PSR's work." The program's core mission, purpose and scope must be clarified and clearly

understood within the program and PF&R, and with program partners before effective communication, outreach, and engagement can occur.

Regarding "Recommendation #5 – Adhere to the Original Mission of PSR and Resist Scope Creep"

PSR's mission is to provide an unarmed response, through the 911 system, to those experiencing mental and behavioral health crises. The program responds almost exclusively to calls for service that would otherwise go to Police. Directives referenced in the recommendation do not conflict with or threaten this mission. In addition, PSR operates as part of the City of Portland's bureau structure under the leadership, guidance, and direction of elected City officials. PSR's service does not operate in a proverbial vacuum. Its success and durability require it to serve the City's greater vision and broader goals across the continuum of care for those in crises.

Regarding "Recommendation #6 – Consider a New Home for PSR if Tensions with PF&R Cannot be Resolved"

Community and taxpayer expectations for emergency response have evolved and continue to evolve – particularly in light of the nagging inability to stand up adequate levels of support for those experiencing mental health and/or substance abuse crises in Oregon.

PSR is a program of value to the City and the community. Its current liabilities and weaknesses will remain regardless of where PSR may be assigned within the City of Portland. PF&R, as a steward of the public's resources and trust, is working to address these deficiencies to ensure the program's long-term stability.

We are fortunate to have a workforce within PSR that has a high level of compassion and care for the people they serve. From this, a structure can, and must, be built to ensure this much-needed service sustains itself into Portland's long-term future. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ryan Gillespie
Division Chief