

Safer Summer PDX Emergency Declaration
Mayor Wheeler Speech
July 21, 2022

Introduction

Until Portland's gun murders stop, we will not stop.

We will not stop until we get justice for more gun violence victims and their families.

We will not stop until we bring peace back to those Portland neighborhoods too often caught in the crossfire.

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Today, I am presenting a two-year, evidence-based plan called Safer Summer PDX.

This plan is specific and provides actionable goals to better coordinate existing resources and activates \$2.4 million to near-term, community-based violence interventions.

Safer Summer PDX is accompanied by an emergency declaration that will implement the plan in an agile, accountable, coordinated and fair manner, reducing Portland's gun violence by at least 10 percent over the next two years.

Safer Summer PDX focuses on providing positive options for those who are now engaged in gun crimes, and creates options for them to step away from the life of violence.

It complements the law-enforcement gun violence improvements that are already in place and showing results.

In 2020, Chief Lovell and I created the Enhanced Community Safety Team, known as the ECST, within the Portland Police Bureau.

In this calendar year alone, the ECST has been assigned over 250 cases related to gun violence and continues to work diligently to bring perpetrators to justice.

In 2021, I directed the creation of the Focused Intervention Team, known as the "FIT" which includes a strong Community Oversight Group.

The "FIT COG" conducts weekly meetings to review ongoing FIT actions to ensure the team operates in a manner consistent with community values.

This year, the FIT has recovered dozens of guns and made over 100 arrests.

In 2021, Portland also expanded its partnership in the Portland Area Crime Gun Initiative, convened by the Oregon U.S. Attorney.

It brings all levels of law enforcement together to address gun violence in Portland.

This initiatives reviews gun violence crimes with an eye toward federal prosecutions, as appropriate, and makes referrals to provide services for high-risk individuals.

We are continuing our recruitment efforts to hire more armed police officers and unarmed public safety specialists.

While we still have a ways to go in achieving my goal of hiring an additional 300 police bureau staff in three years, I am proud to say we are making progress.

This morning, 23 new staff were sworn in, including Public Safety Specialists, support staff, and over a dozen sworn officers.

As we increase staffing and collaboration among law enforcement, the ability to constitutionally investigate, arrest, and prosecute those who murder or attempt to murder others with a gun also increases.

But Portland will not cure our gun violence problem through law enforcement and prosecutions alone.

We understand that it takes law enforcement and criminal justice agencies AND community-focused violence intervention efforts to bring peace back to Portland.

That is why in 2021, City Council expanded investments in community programs like the Park Ranger team to better ensure the safety of public spaces.

In addition, Council allocated a total of over \$10 million over the next two years to increase community-based violence prevention programs through the Office of Violence Prevention, known as “OVP.”

And, why, last month, we brought the City’s Crime Prevention Program and OVP into the Community Safety Division to better strengthen coordination among all community-based safety programs.

Each of these efforts are important elements to addressing this deadly issue. And yet, despite these and other community safety improvements, gun violence in Portland continues to increase.

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To improve our results, we needed a deeper understanding of the exact nature and drivers of Portland’s gun violence.

That is why I commissioned the California Partnership for Safe Communities, an independent expert group, to analyze the exact nature of gun violence in our city.

That data allows us to more precisely guide our actions and investments to achieve quicker and better results.

Last week, California Partnership for Safe Communities finalized their problem analysis report on Portland’s gun violence.

The research findings are sobering, but it provides us with the actionable insight we need to tweak and change and create better solutions.

The report highlights four important aspects of Portland's gun problem:

- First, just over half of the gun violence we see is group member involved. The data estimates that a little over 200 individuals are responsible for the vast majority of the city's gun violence.
- Second, the largest age group involved with gun crimes is between 25 to 34 years of age.
- Third, although African-American males make up 5.9 percent of Portland's population, they comprise 47 percent of shooting victims and suspects.
- Fourth, starting from our low baseline of gun violence, Portland's rate of gun violence has increased faster than many of our peer cities: 207 percent since 2019.

Our two-year plan, Safer Summer PDX, along with my new emergency declaration, which is designed to fast-track plan implementation across City bureaus, is built on these new research findings.

Emergency declarations can get results the status quo cannot.

It organizes the work needed within a unified command structure and provides the agility and ability to address gun violence in our community.

It boils down to this:

The Safer Summer PDX plan is the start of a two-year plan to reduce gun murders by at least 10 percent over the next two years by increasing effective community-based violence interventions.

First, based on the data we have, we know that about 200 people are actively involved in local gun violence in Portland.

We are going to fund community-based messengers – outreach workers not connected to law enforcement or criminal justice programs – to reach out to the small number of Portlanders most at risk of being involved in gun violence.

Rather than arrest and prosecute, our goal of the program will be to offer each person at risk of gun violence a meaningful and workable plan tailored to each person's needs to prevent them from getting involved with it in the first place.

For those already engaged in gun violence, we will provide all that we can to help them decide to stop and leave that life behind.

Second, we will be expanding place-based interventions in neighborhoods that are caught in the crossfire of gun violence.

Like the pilot effort led by Commissioner Hardesty near Mt. Scott, these efforts will work with communities to identify environmental changes to interrupt gun violence.

These interventions could include increased lighting, traffic diversion, or the use of non-law enforcement personnel to maintain positive environments in public spaces.

Third, there are a number of gun violence and criminal hot spots that will require us to use all our tools, including law enforcement and community-based interventions, to restore peace like the situation you read about in last Sunday's Oregonian along 82nd Avenue.

Fourth, and this is very important, as we do this community violence intervention work, we need to do it effectively, consistently, AND fairly.

That is why I have embedded the involvement of a city attorney in the inner workings of this plan and emergency declaration.

City Attorney Tony Garcia, who does not provide legal advice to the police bureau, will serve as the Legal Review Counsel.

In this role, he will watch over all of our shoulders asking tough questions, playing the contrarian, and advising the team to make sure we protect the legal rights of clients we reach out to with community-based nonprofit partners.

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We will continue to be persistent, agile, and responsive in our efforts and investments.

As we learn more and this issue continues to evolve, we will adapt and assess all potential paths forward.

The public's expectations are clear and we've set our goals accordingly.

We will not stop until the gun violence stops.

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Before I turn it over to Director Mike Meyers, I want to speak directly to those involved in gun violence within our city, and those who know others involved with it. My message to you is this:

We do not choose the life we are born into. I know that many of you have been dealt an incredibly challenging hand in life whether that is due to your family situation, the discrimination you face on a daily basis, or simple mistakes that put you on a rocky path.

I am here to tell you that we want to offer you a way out.

We want to provide you with the tools, resources, and support needed to lead a better, safer life for you and your loved ones.

We will be seeking to connect with our community-based outreach workers to try and connect with you.

We will also be establishing a hotline where you can confidentially reach out to us.

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With that, I will turn it over to Director Meyers, who I have appointed as the Incident Commander of this Emergency Declaration and lead of Safer Summer PDX, to walk through how the action plan is organized...