



**PORTLAND
FIRE & RESCUE**



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April 26, 2022

To Dr. Greg Townley and the Portland State University evaluation team;

We thank you for your thorough evaluation of Portland Street Response at the one-year mark. Since creating the City's first new branch of the emergency response system in nearly 150 years, it has been paramount that we work strategically in building Portland Street Response. Having an expert and independent evaluation of the program is a key component of making sure we get it right. Dr. Townley and his team have been indefatigable in gathering data to evaluate Portland Street Response and we take this feedback seriously.

Portland Fire & Rescue contracted with Portland State University's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative to conduct a program evaluation of Portland Street Response that helps to determine the overall effectiveness of the program, provides suggestions for program refinement and adaptation, and offers recommendations for scaling Portland Street Response up citywide

At the six-month point, your evaluation made nine recommendations and we're pleased to see that at the year mark we have made significant headway:

You asked us to expand Portland Street Response.

While we haven't yet hit the full mark that you suggest of being 24/7, we have expanded citywide and have submitted a budget request for the next fiscal year that would allow us to respond 24/7 by the fall, if the money is appropriated. You have also noted: "It is also imperative to expand call criteria to allow the team to respond inside residences, to be dispatched on calls involving suicide, and to respond to some calls involving higher levels of acuity." We are currently meeting with leaders from the Portland Police Association (PPA) and the Portland Police Bureau (PPB) as part of a larger committee that the PPA contract outlined as the channel to decide on these sorts of expansions. We are currently in discussions with our partners and are advocating for these expansions. The committee is expected to have recommendations filed by June 2022. As the report notes, one

goal of the program is to reduce low acuity call volume for other first responders and you feel strongly that PSR consistently reduces police calls by 4%. As you stated “...even at this early stage, we feel highly confident that Portland Street Response is positioned to make a substantial reduction in calls to service to PPB and other first responders as the program expands its geographic scope and operating hours.” We believe expanded call types will also help with this goal.

You told us to trust the team to lead but provide them with ample support

Evaluators noted that the experience and perspective of our team members is one of our most valuable resources and they need to be supported as they respond in highly visible and oftentimes stressful environments. You recommended in our six-month report that team members should have regular opportunities for ongoing individual clinical supervision. That recommendation has been fulfilled: staff members have now been connected to individual clinical supervisors. As you mention, “open communication and transparency about programmatic decisions is vital and will boost morale, reduce burnout, and reflect the values of a program rooted in social justice and equity” and we will work hard to implement these workplace ideals as we grow.

You encouraged us to continue to refine community outreach and education efforts

The evaluation reports that there have been some gains in rates of knowledge of the program among unhoused community members and larger gains among general community members. There is much room for improvement and as you noted, we are working with an agency on a significant awareness campaign about the program. Additionally, as the team has grown, we have been able to increase our ability to both create and attend more outreach events. We expect to see the results of these strategic efforts in the next evaluation.

You asked us to address 911 capacity issues and provide PSR-specific support to dispatchers

Your research shows that users have reported a hard time reaching 911 dispatchers due to the unprecedented emergency call volumes and staffing shortages at the Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC). You also note that certain segments of the community feel unsafe calling 911. Per BOEC’s request, we are currently asking the community to call 911 to request our service rather than the non-emergency number. The percentage of PSR calls compared to

overall call volume will not impact other emergency services. At this time, the non-emergency number does not function in a way that could dispatch PSR in a prompt and effective manner. BOEC is currently instituting a variety of new measures to help handle call volume, from creating automated processes to reduce call backs for pocket dials, to increased hiring and training of new staff to working closely with 311 to redirect appropriate non-emergency calls. We believe that when all of these measures are instituted, we can potentially look at ways to send calls to the non-emergency number. Additionally, as part of our awareness outreach campaign, we are attempting to educate the public about how dispatch works and BOEC's mechanisms for sending out PSR. We work closely with our BOEC partners on increasing education to floor staff about sending calls out for PSR. Adding on a new emergency response branch to a dispatch center is extremely complicated and when you add the variety of ways PSR incrementally expands, it becomes even more challenging. Even with these barriers, we feel the dispatchers at BOEC have done a great job learning as we all move through this creation and expansion together.

You suggest enhancing understanding and communication between first responders

Your report notes that rank and file members at Portland Fire & Rescue continue to express a lack of understanding about PSR functions. As our staff expands and we service different parts of the city, we are building station visits into our operations. We hope these face-to-face meetings will create organic information sharing. Regarding communication with dispatch, we have added the Fire Liaison at BOEC to the team's weekly BOEC/PSR status call to help us flesh out any issues. We also have monthly meetings scheduled with Portland Police Bureau's command staff, Behavioral Health Unit staff, and attend the all-Sergeant staff meeting quarterly. We plan to take your suggestion and coordinate trainings across the other public safety bureaus to foster better understanding of the PSR approach as well as to understand the other bureau's approaches.

You recommend keeping Portland Street Response housed within Portland Fire & Rescue but affirm its unique culture and identity

We are currently housed within Portland Fire & Rescue and have recently been reorganized to operate under Portland Fire & Rescue's new Community Health Division. The Community Health Division shares a common vision to innovatively address the more non-emergent calls that come into 911 with compassion and

allow for our public safety partners to focus their service on life-saving emergencies

You recommend that we address gaps that prevent PSR from connecting clients to resources

As you noted, there are increased resources coming online in 2022 such as Multnomah County's new Behavioral Health Resource Center and The Behavioral Health Emergency Coordination Network (BHECN). Thank you for recognizing the tireless work of mutual aid organizations with whom we partner: we agree that maintaining and expanding these relationships are a key component of successful community outcomes. In addition, we will continue to track in our charting system the gaps that exist in the social infrastructure of which our team and clients are directly impacted.

You suggest that we continue to refine data procedures and outcome goals

We appreciate your notice of the good work of our data analyst. As noted, we need to upgrade our information sharing protocols and we are researching new platforms to engage. We will take you up on your offer to help us re-engage PSR staff and community stakeholders around refining the goals of Portland Street Response based on where the program is today.

You remind us to continue to advance racial equity

You recognize that we have done a good job of hiring a diverse group of people for our team and you rightfully point out that we must retain and promote Black, Indigenous, or Other People of Color (BIPOC) employees to both reflect the community and to connect with issues that affect BIPOC people more than the greater population, such as the criminalization of homelessness and mental health crisis. As the program grows, we will look for opportunities to put qualified BIPOC candidates in leadership positions. As noted earlier in the report, we have increased our outreach capacity and specifically aim to connect with BIPOC community members. And we are working with a marketing firm that is partnering with BIPOC focused non-profits on a larger advertising and awareness campaign.

A note about our oversight committee

In addition to the outside evaluation you provide us, we are currently forming an oversight committee that will help us shape policy and reframe our objectives based on your suggestions as well as feedback from the community. This oversight committee will be composed of professionals representing first response and mental health, as well as community members with lived experience in the areas we focus on such as homelessness, mental health, and behavioral health. We see this active and engaged committee as a perfect complement to the data gathering that your team pursues.

Thank you for your evaluation and helping us to stay focused on our goals and outcomes. We look forward to work with you on our next review in six months.

Sincerely,

Robyn Burek

Robyn Burek

Portland Street Response Manager