



## WESTERN STATES CENTER

September 23, 2020

TO: Governor Kate Brown  
House Speaker Tina Kotek  
Senate President Peter Courtney  
Mayor Ted Wheeler  
Commissioner Amanda Fritz  
Commissioner Chloe Eudaly  
Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty  
Commissioner Dan Ryan  
Portland Police Bureau Chief Chuck Lovell  
Multnomah County District Attorney Mike Schmidt  
Oregon State Police Superintendent Travis Hampton  
Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum

Dear City of Portland and Oregon leaders,

A year ago, ahead of a potentially destructive rally by far-right groups, our region's leaders joined together to deliver a unified message that violence, paramilitarism and racism are not welcome in Oregon. As we look ahead to the planned rally by paramilitary and alt-right figures on September 26th in Portland, we are reaching out to ask you—the elected and appointed leaders with the authority and responsibility to keep our community safe—to renew your commitment and take additional steps to create lasting change.

City officials, community organizations, and many Portlanders have come together to oppose regular incursions into Portland by white nationalist and anti-democratic groups within the past three years, yet these groups continue to target our city with the goal of sowing chaos and violence. By using Portland as a place to hone their paramilitary training and garner the media attention they need to promote themselves, alt-right and paramilitary groups are now working to build power around the region, chill democratic practice, threaten community safety, and undermine civil society.

On September 17, the rally organizers announced that they would change the rally location from downtown to North Portland. It is not yet clear what this move means in terms of the risks involved for the community, but we do know that paramilitary and alt-right actors have engaged in political violence in downtown and nearby areas alike, and that events outside of downtown have resulted in later violence in other locations. The rally is now planned on the site of Vanport City, which was known for its significant Black population due to racist housing practices in other areas, and was washed away in a 1948 flood.

We acknowledge there are divisions and complexities, but political violence and deaths are preventable and unnecessary. They are symptomatic of the failure of civil society and democratic structures to rise above the bias and confusion of both-siderism. It's time for leaders at every level to draw a clear moral distinction between hate activity and political disagreement.

While paramilitary and alt-right actions in Portland are often amplified as a form of spectacle, we know that their track record also includes countless instances of assault and intimidation. From the assault of residents going about their daily lives in Portland and Vancouver, to a homophobic speaker in Salem calling for leaders who promote LGBTQ rights to be "shot dead," we know that the actions allowed on the streets of Portland have ripple effects across our region. Most recently, the spread of vigilantism and paramilitary action in Oregon has jeopardized essential fire relief efforts, as conspiracy theories have prompted armed confrontations and turned neighbor against neighbor. Organizers' own promotion of the September 26 rally in Portland uses disturbing rhetoric praising vigilante shootings in Kenosha, with one leader claiming in since-deleted posts that he will be coming to Portland armed and declaring the situation as "war," deepening our concern for the risk of political violence.

Today, we're asking for action:

- Coordination between the Portland Police Bureau, the Multnomah County District Attorney, and other law enforcement agencies to protect community safety.
- A joint statement of solidarity with community and business leaders against hate and violence from the recipients of this letter.
- A commitment from law enforcement to avoid bias in policing and to undertake the difficult task of relying on disciplined application of de-escalation tactics rather than physical confrontation with counter-protesters. We also ask law enforcement to intervene to prevent physical violence and to take the deployment of weapons seriously.
- A visible display of our community's commitment to oppose hate and defend civil society, to include lights or banners, on Portland City Hall, the Oregon Convention Center and other government buildings in Portland and Salem. We'll be displaying "Rose City United" graphics in our home, business and worship space windows and we hope you'll do the same.

City leaders must make clear that they will not allow Portland to be used as the battleground for a war by proxy. Portland must be united in saying: Not in our town. Not anywhere. We have an opportunity to tell a different story, build a different blueprint for a united government and community response that shrinks space for political violence. Every local elected official should be studying the lessons of the Rose City. Why? Defending our democratic freedoms and institutions is the job of business, faith, community, and municipal leaders. Defending our democratic freedoms and institutions is the job of all of us.

With respect and hope,  
Western States Center and partner signatories listed below

Basic Rights Oregon  
Business for a Better Portland  
Cascade AIDS Project  
Causa  
Family Forward Oregon  
Heart of the Pearl  
Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice  
Laborers' Local 483  
Main Street Alliance of Oregon  
Motherroots Counseling  
NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon  
OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon  
Oregon AFSCME Women's Committee  
Oregon Food Bank  
Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education  
Oregon Justice Resource Center  
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility  
Oregon Tradeswomen  
Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon  
PCUN (Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste)  
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon  
Portland YouthBuilders  
Professional Business Development Group  
Rural Organizing Project  
SAGE Metro Portland  
SEIU 49  
SEIU 503  
Showing Up for Racial Justice Springfield-Eugene Chapter  
Verde  
Voz Workers' Rights Education Project  
Zen Community of Oregon  
350PDX