



November 12, 2018

Bruce Harrell, President, Seattle City Council
Lorena González, Chair, Gender Equity, Safe Communities, New Americans & Education Committee
City Hall
600 Fourth Ave, 2nd Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear President Harrell and Chairwoman González:

During my almost 27 years of service, I have done my best to hold true to the principle that the police should not play politics, but strive to do our jobs to protect our neighborhoods with empathy, equity, and transparency. As Chief of Police, I also believe that I must strongly speak out about what is required for the department and the City to protect public safety. Passing the Tentative Agreement quickly is critical for reforms, safety, and our officers, and every week that goes by has a significant impact on our department.

As Chief of the Seattle Police Department, with or without a new labor agreement, I guarantee we will continue to exceed the requirements of the Consent Decree. What I cannot guarantee is what this department will look like without a new agreement. In the face of historically low unemployment, skyrocketing costs of living, competition from local jurisdictions, and the perception by many officers that their work is neither acknowledged or respected, our already-constrained ability to hire the best and the brightest will only become more difficult.

Jurisdictions around the state, and the country, look to Seattle as fertile ground for the recruitment of exceptional officers. In addition to struggling to recruit officers at 2014 wages, our officers are leaving, and will only continue to leave if this agreement is not ratified quickly.

This is not a scare tactic; it is a reality of our current situation. The Department will continue to work to ensure public safety, but we will have to make hard decisions about how we handle issues outside of our core mission. We are deeply committed to all of our innovative programs, but many of these are only possible with adequate staffing.

Most importantly, our current officers and any officers we recruit are committed to reform. Absolutely nothing in the proposed labor agreement pulls this Department back from the path of continuous reform. This department knows that there is no “end goal” for reform – as the needs of our communities change, as the demands for police services shift, reform is a continuing process of critical self-analysis, review, and drive towards improvement. This is both a process and a commitment that the Seattle Police Department has solidly demonstrated and will continue to embrace. These continuing reform efforts are not dependent on any contract. The recognized work of the past five years was done under old labor agreements. The recent SPMA agreement and this SPOG agreement cement important tools to help advance reform, but they do not create reform. Reform has been the product of hard work and commitment from SPD leadership, SPD supervisors and officers, justice system stakeholders, community partners, and the people of this amazing city. And that will continue to be the case.

The men and women of the Seattle Police Department have done the hard work necessary for the City and the Department to be found in “full and effective compliance” with the federal Consent Decree, and they have done so under a level of scrutiny that is unprecedented in policing. For this, the officers and sergeants

who have embraced the new trainings, standards, and oversight mechanisms, deserve not only our admiration and thanks, but they deserve to have these achievements and new working conditions recognized in a fair labor contract.

It is not just a judicial ruling or my words alone that confirm their achievements – the data, published openly on our site, prove the point. Of the hundreds of thousands of calls for service to which Seattle Police Department officers respond annually, fewer than one-fifth of one percent of these calls results in any use of force; and fewer than 0.004% of these calls result in a use of force significant enough to cause potentially serious injury. While crisis calls continue to surge – up 26% over the first six months of this year alone, use of force remains empirically rare, with less than 2% resulting in any use of force, and of these, only a few result in any level of force higher than low-level, Type I force.

We are asking more of our officers than ever before – both in the issues they are called to deal with on the street and the level of oversight every one of their actions is subjected to. This is modern policing and we have eagerly met the challenge of setting a new national standard. We welcome the engagement of each of the oversight bodies set up to ensure our continuing commitment to reform, whether the Office of Police Accountability, the Office of Inspector General, the Community Police Commission, the Seattle City Council, the U.S. Department of Justice, the federal Monitor, or the federal Judge, as well as each of the community groups we engage with consistently to make sure we are meeting the public safety needs of the entire city.

Finally, the SPOG labor agreement has followed the same course of every other labor agreement made between this city and its employees. The relevant parties have been involved throughout the negotiations and were fully aware of the give-and-take that produced the final product. The officers and sergeants approved the agreement. It is time for the City to uphold its role and recognize the work of these employees, ensure they are paid a fair wage, and have a say in their labor rights and responsibilities.

The officers of the Seattle Police Department have done all that has been asked of them, and more. I urge you to support our continuing work by quickly approving the Tentative Agreement without any delay

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carmen Best". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carmen Best
Chief of Police
Seattle Police Department

CC

Lisa Herbold, Councilmember, District 1
Kshama Sawant, Councilmember, District 3
Rob Johnson, Councilmember, District 4
Deborah Juarez, Councilmember, District 5
Mike O'Brien, Councilmember, District 6
Sally Bagshaw, Councilmember, District 7
Teresa Mosqueda, Councilmember, District 8