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# Portland Street Response supporters petition city to prioritize program

By Nicole Hayden | The Oregonian/OregonLive

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Community supporters of Portland Street Response, the city's mental health emergency response team, have launched a petition asking the city to prioritize the program and restore its original mission.

The group, called [Friends of Portland Street Response](#) are calling for immediate action to address policies they believe are [hindering Portland Street Response workers](#) from doing their jobs.

So far, near 40 community organizations, businesses and political leaders have signed the petition.

Those who have signed the petition include the ACLU of Oregon, Blanchet House, Multnomah County District Attorney Mike Schmidt, Northwest Pilot Project and Portland area Democratic Reps. Rob Nosse, Khanh Pham, Lisa Reynolds and Maxine Dexter, among others.

The program responded to nearly 7,400 calls within the last year, 98% of which had been traditionally handled by police, according to program data. The program reduced the number of mental health calls armed police respond to by sending mental health workers and EMTs to assist people in crisis.

But Portland Street Response workers fear for its future with support for the program seemingly plummeting at City Hall and questions about its long-term funding. Interim Fire Chief Ryan Gillespie put a freeze on purchases this spring, which means Street Response staffers don't have access to supplies like clothes and food, which they say aid them in doing their job.

Commissioner Rene Gonzalez, the new commissioner in charge of the Fire Bureau, said that Portland Street Response needs to be "right-sized" after it grew too quickly under his predecessor, [Jo Ann](#)

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“Recent council action has demonstrated a lack of support for Portland Street Response at Portland City Hall,” Friends of Portland Street Response said in an online statement. “It is clear that this incredibly popular, effective and desperately needed program is now at risk.”

The group is asking the city to:

- End the hiring freeze
- Expand the program to 24-hour operations
- Allow the purchase of supplies like clothing, harm reduction aids and food
- Keep Portland Street Response workers out of enforcement activities such as sweeps of homeless encampments
- Allow the program to respond to more types of calls including ones inside residences or involving potential suicide victims
- Move the program into a more supportive branch of the city’s first responder network

The group is calling on more people to sign the petition to continue putting pressure on the city.

“As Friends of Portland Street Response, we are united in our unequivocal support for the original goals of PSR and the specific actions needed to restore and support the program,” the statement said.

Spokespeople for Gonzalez and the Fire Bureau didn’t immediately respond to requests for comment.

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