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Kaia Sand | Friends of PSR delivers petition to City Hall

Opinion | Petition for PSR amasses more than 10,000 signatures

3–4 minutes

9 Aug 2023

Friends of Portland Street Response organizers delivered a 10,000-signatures-and-growing petition to Portland City Hall on Aug. 2 at noon, celebrating on the steps with a giant check depicting the signature count.

While this milestone represents deep community support, the campaign has a great deal of work ahead. Most of the demands have not been met thus far.

There is progress on the first demand — lifting the hiring freeze. Commissioner Rene Gonzalez imposed the hiring freeze in February. Gonzalez oversees Portland Fire and Rescue, or PFR, the bureau housing Portland Street Response, or PSR.

The Friends of Portland Street Response petition went live July 24, and on July 28, Gonzalez’s office announced it had lifted the hiring freeze, tweeting it started lifting the freeze July 24.

Ryan Gillespie, PFR interim chief, confirmed the hiring freeze was lifted. However, PFR “is still under significant budget pressure for Fiscal Year 23-24,” therefore, the “PSR Program Manager, along with other managers and supervisors within PF&R, are directed to

run hiring requests through the chain-of-command,” he explained in an email. Gillespie makes final decisions.

It’s unfortunate funds are mixed in the PFR budget, so programs must compete for the same pool of money. That’s a zero-sum game undercutting cooperation. City Council needs to remedy this. After all, calls that go to PSR cut down on police calls as well as emergency room visits.

At its core, PSR is about creating better options for people in crisis. Whether you witness a crisis or are in the throes of one, you need good options. Portland Street Response needs to be fully staffed so it can quickly respond when called, and the teams all must include a crisis worker and a medic.

Gillespie confirmed PSR workers have access to water, “which is approved for distribution by PF&R responders,” but other supplies are on hold while the bureau works “through our procurement and distribution policies within Community Health.” They are working on approval to distribute naloxone, but that is currently being “reviewed by our medical director, Dr. Jon Jui, the City Attorney’s Office, and Community Health leadership,” Gillespie wrote in an email.

Are you interested in helping see through the full implementation of PSR? Sign the petition to stay up-to-date on the next actions.

Do you have a story about PSR helping someone in crisis?

Friends of PSR would love to hear it. Email friendsofpsr@gmail.com.

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