



VIA EMAIL

April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020

RE: COVID-19 Response

Dear Executive Director Scott and Co-Chairs:

I want to thank you, and the entire Community Police Commission, for inquiring how we can all work together to best serve the community in these unprecedented times. It is reaffirming that in each of these areas, which I will specifically address, the Seattle Police Department is already working with other parts of the city – this clearly demonstrates we are a community united.

### **Disparity**

From day one of this crisis, my message to the officers has been that our number one mission is supporting public health and public safety; and, as such, officers are to primarily focus on imminent risks to the safety of persons and property, so as to not place the community members or themselves at increased risk of exposure to COVID-19. Please continue to inform me of any concerns the CPC, or the community directly, have around disparate enforcement during these times.

### **Hate Crimes**

Perhaps in part due to the strength of our community here in Seattle, SPD has not confronted the levels of bias crime and hate crime incidents reflected in the current national trend of reported increased incidents. That being said, these incidents have and will occur in Seattle and we will not shy away from addressing the concerns raised by the community regarding hate crime and incidents where hate is a factor. To that end, SPD has issued several public service messages to the public and to our officers and detectives, highlighting that preventing and responding to hate crime and bias incidents remains a priority for SPD at all times, and particularly during this time of communal strain.

SPD also produced a Hate Crimes PSA with Lori Matsukawa, which raised community awareness through national and local media coverage. The Anti-Defamation League included the Seattle Police PSA in its most recent publication. SPD will continue to track and respond to these incidents. The Bias Crimes dashboard is available to the public to review which bias crimes are being reported in the city and where they are occurring. The Bias Crime Dashboard can be found [here](#). The bias crimes dashboard is in addition to the twice-yearly bias crimes report that is issued to the city council. We want people in Seattle to be confident in our commitment to mitigating hate crime and bias incidents.

## **People Living Outside**

When it comes to vulnerable populations living outdoors, SPD participates in the Human Services Department Navigation Team to assist with outreach and movement of those living outdoors to more secure housing. SPD engagement is under the auspices of the City's Navigation Team. As this COVID-19 crisis began, the City directed the Navigation Team to further limit its work to only moving individuals who were creating an imminent public safety or health risk. This was in direct recognition of the need to limit actions that increase contacts between individuals.

## **Domestic Violence**

As this public health crisis began, SPD immediately started monitoring, on a daily basis, the change in calls to 911 and officer responses. Given our experiences with past events forcing individuals to spend unusual amounts of time together, we were on heightened awareness to watch for upticks in domestic violence and related calls. Early on we made connections with multiple domestic violence stakeholders to ensure they were connected with SPD to offer advice, guidance and logistical support. We have consistently monitored and responded to the increase in domestic violence calls. Our officers are working with our victim support team and our victim advocates to ensure all victims have access to the support and services they need, via our own outreach and that of domestic violence stakeholders and community partners including: 24-hour hotlines, individual, legal, and medical advocacy; safety planning; mental health services; connection to resources; and housing.

Additionally, Assistant Chief Nollette produced a video PSA released on 3/30/20 encouraging the thorough investigation and follow up of all domestic violence calls by our officers.

## **Criminal Justice Contacts**

As noted previously, as this pandemic began, I made it very clear to all officers that our focus was the protection of life and property. Officers were instructed to limit contacts that did not address imminent risk to either life or property and to wear their personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect themselves and the community. Additionally, the 911 Call Center was instructed to direct lower priority calls, all those except for Priority 1 and 2 calls, to online and telephone reporting.

## **Reduce Parking Enforcement**

The City began conversations around how to best adapt parking restrictions as soon as the Stay Home order was discussed. SPD is the enforcement arm of the parking restrictions, with the Seattle Department of Transportation being the rule-making authority. SPD made it plainly clear that Police Officers and Parking Enforcement Officers would immediately adhere to new guidance on parking restrictions. As these rules changed, SPD has immediately notified its officers, and the public, of these changes. Earlier this month the City issued temporary changes to Seattle Parking Management and Enforcement for the COVID-19 public health crisis and Stay Home, Stay Healthy order. The suspension of paid parking, street parking and time limited enforcement as outlined [here](#).

## Protect First Responders

As I have noted since the first days of this crisis, as the Chief of this department, my number one priority is the safety and well-being of my employees. Officers cannot provide public safety if they are not able to perform their duties under any circumstance – whether a disaster or this pandemic. Without officers, there are no guardians of public safety for the community. From the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak we focused our efforts on protecting first responders and the community. Also, working with the Seattle Fire Department, we established the nation’s first, first responder testing site. We also worked with the City to set up temporary housing options for first responders who could not return home for a variety of reasons.

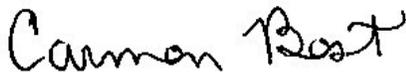
## Recommendations

In reference to your specific recommendations

1. Reduce Parking Enforcement – On 4/3/2020, the Executive, working with the Department of Transportation, announced further easing of parking restrictions. SPD Parking Enforcement is focused on issues that create safety hazards and accessibility hazards.
2. Hotel Vouchers – SPD communicated with key domestic violence stakeholders who have confirmed that their access to safe housing are currently not exhausted. SPD has made it clear the city would assess using currently reserved hotel space for these victims if access becomes an issue. Furthermore, the City is standing up a variety of shelter and housing resources for those individuals living outside. A key element of this approach is having the staff to manage these resources.
3. Best Practices – SPD has significantly increased its direct communications with employees to ensure all are aware of current policies and practices. SPD is following the City’s direction in the use and availability of diversion programs.

I want to thank you again for your continued partnership in ensuring the SPD, and the entire City, work to ensure public safety for all. We are all in this together and as new issues arise, I hope we can discuss them, with the same goal of a just and equitable City. In times of unpredictability we must respond quickly, so contemporaneous conversations are best.

Sincerely,



Carmen Best  
Chief of Police  
Seattle Police Department