



City of Seattle



February 2, 2021

To: City of Seattle Councilmembers, Mayor Jenny Durkan, Seattle Office for Civil Rights

Dear Honorable City Councilmembers -

The Seattle LGBTQ Commission and the Seattle Human Rights Commission urge you to use your authority under [Article IV, Section 4 of the Seattle City Charter](#) to “compel” witnesses in a public hearing regarding the involvement of Seattle Police Department, Seattle Police Officers Guild, and its officers at the “Stop the Steal” Rally in Washington, D.C. on January 6, 2021, as well as the armed insurrection of the Capitol Building itself on the same day. Specifically, we request an inquest into whether any Seattle Police Department (SPD) or Seattle Police Officers Guild (SPOG) officials knew in advance that members would be attending, whether officers were encouraged to attend, whether any city resources were used in support of officers’ attendance, and whether the culture within SPD and SPOG encourages political extremism, particularly that of the alt-right or white nationalism.

This hearing may need to be done in tandem with an investigation by the Office of the Inspector General, which can use its power of subpoena as granted by the Seattle Municipal Code to receive testimony on the record from officials within SPD and SPOG, specifically the testimony of SPOG President Mike Solan. Further, we demand that such an investigation be completed prior to negotiations with SPOG for their new contract. In doing so we join community members and coalitions, such as County Black Lives Matter Seattle King County¹ and the #SubpoenaSolan coalition movement on social media, as well as the many community groups that have spoken to our Commissions and the Office for Civil Rights in the past.

We are concerned that to date, SPD has confirmed five sworn officers were in attendance at the rally in Washington DC. Seattle Police Department involvement represents one of the largest contingents from any single police department in the United States². Further, as the Capitol Building was being breached, Mike Solan posted social media messages blaming “BLM” and “Antifa” for the insurrection, and predicting that “police will be blamed for this”.

In public statements, SPD has drawn a distinction between attendance at the rally and participation in storming the Capitol building. However, as the purpose of the rally was to call

¹ See: “BLM Seattle demands Mayor Durkan halt bargaining with SPOG” by Black Lives Matter Seattle King County at <https://blacklivesseattle.org/blm-seattle-demands-mayor-durkan-halt-bargaining-with-spog/>

² See: “Seattle cops make up biggest known contingent of cops at Jan. 6 Capitol rally” by Martin Kaste at <https://kuow.org/stories/police-departments-search-for-political-extremism-in-ranks-following-capitol-riot>

into question and overthrow a free and fair election, we believe that attendance at the rally alone illustrates at best a serious lapse of judgement from those sworn to uphold City, State and Federal law.

These facts taken together paint a dire picture of the state of affairs within the Seattle Police Department.

With the City poised to enter contract negotiations with SPOG this year, it is imperative that the City Council use the powers granted to them by City Charter to identify and root out White Supremacist and Anti-Democracy leanings within its law enforcement apparatus. The previous Collective Bargaining Agreement with SPOG, which passed in October 2018 by a 7-1 vote by City Council and expired on December 31st of 2020, conflicted with the Police Accountability Ordinance, passed unanimously in 2017, in a variety of ways. The most disturbing language in the contract explicitly allows the CBA to supercede the Ordinance, "In the event there is a conflict between the language of the Ordinance and the language of the CBA or the explanations and modifications in this appendix, the language of the CBA or this appendix shall prevail."³ Future bargaining agreements must not include language that violates or in any way undermines the law, and cannot be negotiated in good faith with an active white supremacist element at the table.

White supremacy in SPD impacts public safety on many levels. One especially current concern for Mayor Durkan and some members of our community is the City's response to hate crimes. The Mayor has prioritized addressing hate crimes and particularly those crimes motivated by white supremacy in her final year in office. Without addressing the culture of supremacy and impunity within SPD which tolerates or fosters white nationalism, addressing hate crimes through expanding police and judicial power of discretion will mean that the white, cisgender, affluent and upper class portions of our community may see marginal benefit, but it would be at the expense of Black, Brown, Indigenous and other members of our community targeted by white supremacy. Mayor Durkan cannot hope to achieve her goal of reducing hate crimes by involving a fundamentally racist institution. Our Commissions have been asked to provide feedback on measures to address hate crimes. Our feedback is that the call is coming from inside the house. We cannot address hate crimes without addressing the systemic racism and bias of policing itself.

Particularly given SPD's well documented history of racially biased policing, for which the Department is still under a Federal Consent Decree⁴, we must look at this as a systemic issue rather than the act of five individuals. Our Commissions have been outspoken about our concerns with SPD in the past, and we believe that there is a direct connection between the

³ See: "Will Seattle's Police Contract Stand the Test of Reforms?" by Melissa Hellman at <https://www.seattleweekly.com/news/a-police-contract-to-stand-the-test-of-reforms/>

⁴ See: "Debate over policing in Seattle continues after years of federal oversight" by David Kroman at <https://crosscut.com/2020/06/debate-over-policing-seattle-continues-after-years-federal-oversight>

culture of SPD and its actions on the streets. We cannot afford to let this issue be quietly swept under the rug. Per his public statements, Acting Chief of Police Adrian Diaz has referred these five individuals to the Office of Police Accountability (OPA) and committed to terminating any officer found to have participated in the siege of the Capitol building or otherwise broken the law. OPA is a supposed “civilian oversight” body with the power to recommend but not enforce consequences. Significantly, even “civilian investigator” roles within OPA call for applicants to have experience as sworn law enforcement officers. In recent weeks we have seen this body dismiss several high profile cases of police misconduct perpetrated upon activists in the Summer of 2020 during the Uprising for Black Lives. Respectfully, we assert that the Office of Police Accountability does not have the means or power to effectively investigate this matter.

Once again, as we have repeatedly in the past, we urge you to take decisive action to hold the Seattle Police Department accountable for its racist, anti-Democratic actions and rhetoric. We formally request a public inquest into the issue of white nationalism within SPD’s ranks and that this inquest be complete prior to entering collective bargaining negotiations with SPOG. As a part of this request, we look forward to direct follow up with our Commissions and the Seattle Office for Civil Rights on next steps within two weeks of receipt of this letter.

Sincerely,
The Seattle LGBTQ Commission
The Seattle Human Rights Commission