December 11, 2018

**SUBMITTED VIA E-MAIL**

Portland Public Schools

501 N. Dixon Street

Portland, Oregon 97227

Re: Portland Public Schools & Portland Police Bureau Intergovernmental Agreement

Dear Chair Moore and Members of the Board:

The American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (“ACLU of Oregon”) is concerned with the recent effort by the Portland Public School board (“PPS, or the board”) and the Portland Police Bureau (“PPB”) to increase and further institutionalize the presence of armed law enforcement officers in Portland’s public schools. In addition to the general criticisms we have of the use of armed law enforcement officers in school, we urge PPS to allow more time for student, parents, faculty, staff and at-large public engagement prior to approving the Intergovernmental Agreement (“IGA”) between PPS and PPB currently before the board.

Over the last week, the ACLU of Oregon was contacted by members of the PPS community—students and teachers alike—who complained that the board was moving an IGA between PPS and PPB forward without adequate opportunity for public comment. Indeed, the board’s own Staff Analysis and Report to the Board suggests that community input was sought late in the process and was limited to a few discussions with high school student council representatives.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is our understanding that several schools, including majority minority schools, were completely excluded until very late in the process. We further understand that the limited listening sessions conducted included a heavy law enforcement officer presence. This type of environment may not allow for a robust discussion of the impacts of armed law enforcement presence in public schools as members of the impacted community simply may not feel safe expressing their dissent. Indeed, this complaint was lodged with the ACLU of Oregon. Furthermore, the meetings seemed to be conducted during school hours or with little notice, making it inaccessible to the majority of students. We strongly believe that the board must extend the timeframe for public engagement, including students and faculty, before approving the IGA.

If the board’s goal is to increase school safety, we urge the board to reconsider their allocation of limited funds to initiatives that directly impact students without the use of punitive measures such as restorative justice approaches and effective counseling. Spending more money on law enforcement officers does not provide a meaningful reduction in risk, while costing much more than these other initiatives. The ACLU recently did a study on over 96,000 public schools nationwide addressing the imbalance of student support services – counseling, psychologists, and nurses – and school resource officers.[[2]](#footnote-2) The report is set to be released later this month. Moreover, studies show that an increased presence of school resource officers does not necessarily increase safety in schools. A seven-year-long study in North Carolina found that the presence of law enforcement officers in schools did not reduce assaults, homicide, bomb threats, substance possession or use, or weapons possession.[[3]](#footnote-3) When asked about the purpose of police presence in schools, many law enforcement leaders around the nation stated “disorder”, while superintendents expressed “national media attention about school violence.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

It is important that PPS and city leaders recognize the serious, often long-term impact of law enforcement presence in schools. The use of punishment, especially criminal justice system involvement, in response to issues that can be effectively resolved through alternative means further harms youth and hinders the ability to reform behavior.

We respectfully request that you postpone the approval of any IGA with PPB and reconsider the idea that law enforcement presence in schools makes our students safer and contributes to a learning environment. Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the proposed rulemaking. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

**Leland Baxter-Neal,** Staff Attorney

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1. “Staff Analysis and Report to the Board” (PPS Website), <https://www.pps.net/cms/lib/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/219/PPB_PPS%20Packet%20Final.pdf> (last visited December 11, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Rethinking School Safety” (End Zero Tolerance), <https://www.endzerotolerance.org/single-post/2018/12/05/Rethinking-School-Safety> (last visited December 11, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)