

Press Statement & Open Letter to Eugene and Oregon Leadership
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Contact: deescalateeugene@pm.me

Where is the City Leadership?

“We’re billing the City of Eugene for doing their job for them.”

Thousands of people have protested in our community this past week in support of black lives and against police brutality. The protests have been overwhelmingly peaceful. And the City’s response? Eugene Police Department (EPD) has brought out all of its military equipment and put its full military force on display. They have repeatedly used tear gas, a known lung irritant, against our community—not just protesters. An elderly bystander was pepper-sprayed while filming on the sidewalk, and multiple journalists were tear gassed without warning. There are also reports that EPD has been using expired tear gas, which breaks down into lethal cyanide. This is all happening during the COVID-19 pandemic, which affects the lungs and can result in death, and impacts black and brown communities disproportionately.

Meanwhile, EPD is stalking and hunting down peaceful protesters, for violating artificial and poorly communicated curfews, and for “blocking traffic,” often when there is no traffic. All to exact revenge for the property damage done by a few people on Friday? ‘Hunting’ seems like an exaggeration, you say? An officer was overhead on the police scanner saying, “When you go hunting, you aim to shoot.”

What is the City of Eugene doing? Where is the leadership? Where are the City’s resources going? These are among the many questions that an informal de-escalation group are asking. The group was formed in response to the “God, Guns, and Trump” and other similar rallies in an effort to interrupt inflammatory escalation strategies from armed white supremacist provocateurs targeting marginalized communities. The de-escalation group has been on the ground this past week, and now they are advocating for the city to deescalate its police force.

Once again, the far-right is openly armed in our city. They have formed their own police force that is following the marches of nonviolent protesters with their personal vehicles, patrolling downtown, surreptitiously filming people, threatening protesters, attempting to run over protesters, and promising to shoot anyone who harms private property. Many groups have documented these behaviors. EPD, for the most part, is absent, standing by, or overtly assisting. In fact, EPD apparently allowed one agitator, who recklessly drove into a group of marching protesters and got out of his vehicle brandishing an assault rifle in the middle of the crowd, to drive away *after* they pulled him over.

Members of the de-escalation group have intervened multiple times over the past week to protect peaceful protesters from being shot or run over by armed extremists. That’s right, members of our community *doing the cops’ job for them, without weapons, for free.*

One of the de-escalators stated: “We need to write up an invoice for our supplies and people hours and send it over to the City. We’ve all put in our full forty for the City. Let’s present the Mayor with the bill and let her know that the invoice is payable to the food bank.”

On Sunday night, the cops, with their full military force, were the ones rioting. EPD was pursuing, threatening, and assaulting young protesters with tear gas and pepper balls on the streets of downtown Eugene. Just blocks away, the far-right had its own patrol—truckloads of armed, angry, white men—with ostensibly the same purpose.

Despite EPD’s recent efforts to increase its budget, this week’s unethical policing clearly demonstrates the need to allocate City resources elsewhere. As we hear calls to defund and demilitarize police forces around the nation, we echo those calls in Eugene. Eugene desperately needs increased accountability and transparency for EPD and the City Manager and increased funding to de-escalation services and other community-driven solutions, like CAHOOTS.

As of now, City of Eugene officials from the top down are complicit in EPD’s use of excessive force against people protesting police brutality. People are grieving monumental losses to police violence. At this moment in history, while homelessness runs unabated, a pandemic threatens the well-being of our entire community, and white supremacists attempt violence on peaceful residents, our City funds not relief, but fear and violence doled out by EPD. Is this the response our City wants to be remembered for?

#DefundEPD #DemilitarizeEPD #DeescalateEPD

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