



CITY OF PORTLAND
Police Department
Frank T. Clark, Chief of Police

Portland police chief: 'The police are the public and the public are the police' This concept represents the basic relationship between our police officers and our communities. We stand with you because we are you.

With 32 years in law enforcement, this simple sentence still resonates with me today. Articulated in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel, considered the founder of modern policing, this concept represents the basic relationship between our police officers and our communities. We stand with you because we are you. I'm an optimist, but having been a police officer for more than three decades, I'm also a realist.

This year has brought us all unprecedented stressors and challenges. In May, our police officers, along with other essential service employees, such as health care, fire and emergency medical services professionals, were recognized and appreciated for continuing to do their jobs in an exceptional manner, exposing themselves and their families to the dangers of a global pandemic.

Since June, sparked by the actions of a police officer who murdered a person 1,500 miles away, we've been vilified, threatened and labeled as racist killers whose work is not valued. We've been ostracized from Portland schools and have had threats directed at officers that have caused them to question both their own and their family's safety. Our police station was defaced, then attacked by a shooter, and our officers' actions and intentions have been broadly called into question. Unfortunately, all of this negatively affects community perception, trust, support and compliance with the law, and has even our dedicated cops understandably calling their efforts and futures into question.

So where do we go from here? It cannot be resorting to violence and hate. As public servants, we will continue to hold ourselves to the highest of standards, accountable for our actions and inactions. In my experience, Maine law enforcement, generally, and the Portland Police Department, specifically, is second to none. Officers are screened, hired, trained and expected to do the right things at the right times, with an underlying aim of leaving people better off than when they found them. We have standards to ensure critical policies are in place, such as those regarding use of force and bias-based profiling.

Even prior to the current situation, the Portland Police Department already met the policy and training recommendations outlined in the "8 Can't Wait" platform, ideas that we were told we should have in place in the days and weeks after the Minneapolis tragedy. We've prohibited chokeholds for years; restricted shooting at or from moving vehicles; required de-escalation training; imposed a duty to intervene in any excessive use of force, and required detailed use-of-force reporting and review of all force applications. We are also already a national model and learning site for behavioral health collaborative response.

By the very nature of our profession, the police remain the only entity that consistently responds to every situation where immediate help is needed. When you call 911, we'll be there. Based upon our training, broad skill sets and omnipresent rapid response capacity, our cops have become the de facto service providers in our communities and are expected to be all things to all people – strong, fair, kind and compassionate, whether acting as a crisis worker, child protector, criminal investigator, social worker, community guardian or opponent of violence. Our work in these areas will remain critically necessary even if or when larger and more effective systems are built or rebuilt to support those needs. For their service and dedication, police officers retain my utmost respect and support as they continue to protect and serve.

It is with this challenging backdrop in mind that I also see great opportunities. Successfully moving forward will require a collaborative and informed effort. We will need to challenge ourselves and partner with our community in order to not only enhance voluntary compliance, as well as retain and build trust, but also to both anticipate and address the societal evolutions certain to affect our community and agency in the years ahead. Yes, we all must denounce racism and excessive force. That is a given. At the same time, we must support law enforcement. Doing both is not mutually exclusive.

We look forward to these efforts and will continue to work with you because we are you.