

Statement on the Killing of Robert Delgado

April 21, 2020

Mental Health Alliance Work Group

We are saddened and outraged by the killing of Robert Delgado by officers of the Portland Police Bureau. He was the 29th person killed in an encounter with Portland Police – by shooting, in a fire or in custody – since 2010. On behalf of the Mental Health Alliance, we share in the grief of his tragic death, and offer our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends at the end of his long painful journey.

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Justice found Portland Police has a pattern and practice of using excessive force against people with mental illness, prompting a settlement with the city to enact police reforms. Nine years later, the police bureau is still not in compliance, putting the dispute on the path to unilateral resolution by a federal judge.

Our city has failed to create systems of safety for people with mental illnesses who encounter police. Robert Delgado's tragic death is yet more proof. Of those killed by Portland Police since 2010 most seem to have been undergoing a mental health crisis. Because homelessness is a predictable result of untreated mental illness or addiction, many of those killed were homeless or on the verge of homelessness.

We are outraged, because what led to Delgado's death remains in place to endanger others. Portland is home to thousands of people without shelter who frequently experience mental health crises. Social service resources for mental illness are so thin that police have become the default responders to crisis, and this is often lethal. Little has been done since 2010 to change these facts.

Members of the alliance, which formed in 2018 to track the justice department settlement, understand the anger of the community with police. Solutions to reduce lethal use of force – primarily by reducing contact between police and people in mental health crisis – are well known by policymakers at the federal, state, county, city and public health insurer levels. They must be prioritized.

People in mental health crisis are everyone's business - ours and yours. Our grief and anger come from our shared and fundamental belief that our city's policies should care for the vulnerable. We should care more. Instead, we've left thousands of friends and family members outdoors, sick and without care.

Robust and effective outreach services can be fully funded to be the first and single point of contact for persons in crisis. Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden has recently made this a federal funding priority.

Immediate shelter and voluntary sanctuary should be provided for all people in mental health crisis - and not with tents or temporary shacks. Sweeps and destruction of belongings must end.

Our public health system is misaligned, undermanaged and under-resourced, leaving most people in need without effective and sufficient treatment for mental illness and addiction. That leads to more sickness, more drug and alcohol use, more death by suicide, by accident and, inevitably, at the hands of police.

Finally, our district attorneys have not held a police officer to account for a fatal shooting since 1969. It's time for someone else to conduct these crucial prosecutions. We call on the Multnomah County district attorney to arrange for an independent attorney, Oregon Justice Department, or other district attorney to present Robert Delgado's case to a local grand jury. It's time for a change.

This statement was written by the [Mental Health Alliance Work](#) Group

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[Disability Rights Oregon](#)
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