



Testimony to the Portland City Council
Provided by Kiara Deegan
Custom Protection Officer, G4S
Member, SEIU Local 49

Re: Agenda item #706, support for Clean & Safe

September 23rd, 2021

Good afternoon Mayor Wheeler and Commissioners,

My name is Kiara Deegan and I am a Custom Protection Officer with G4S, assigned to the City contract since September of 2018. I am here today to support the City and the Portland Business Alliance in the commitment to raise and protect standards for the officers that secure downtown.

The work that my co-workers and I do is complex and can be dangerous, but we are highly trained professionals that are committed to making sure downtown is a safe place for *everyone*. We protect the buildings and the infrastructure, make sure employees are able to come and go safely, and we interact with the transient and homeless population that has established camps on City property downtown, making every effort to guide them towards available services. I believe we need to treat humans like humans to get folks one step closer to where they need to be. My coworkers are really compassionate people, we know how to be effective and do our job but we also know we need to make a positive difference in people's lives.

The past year and a half has been hard, with the effects of the pandemic and with all of the protests downtown. Our duties and expectations changed very quickly, almost overnight. We had to enforce mask mandates, and during the riots we frequently found ourselves occupying buildings and areas that were targeted by the rioters. My co-workers and I didn't have a lot of experience or training with situations of this magnitude, none of us had ever dealt with thousands of protestors and a ballooning homeless population, all during a raging pandemic, but we stepped up and did what we had to do. The City would delegate certain things for us to do to deal with the new problems that were occurring daily, and our Field Training Officers, including myself, figured out a plan to keep everyone safe. The majority of our officers aren't tactically armed, but we handled each situation by using our words, or what I like to call "verbal judo."

Throughout these challenges, I have been so grateful that my co-workers and I have our union. When I started at a union site, it was refreshing to me because I knew there was officer oversight. A lot of non-union companies don't want to empower their officers to reach out to entities other than their security command. But having a union offers transparency and gives the officers the opportunity to stand up for what is right. Having a union means we are able to hold our employers' feet to the fire to keep a safe and healthy work environment.

My co-workers and I also really appreciate our union wages and benefits, and other things like being assigned to a fair schedule. When I was an officer without union, I didn't have access to benefits. But with the union, my benefits are readily available and officers are fully informed and are aware of our rights. We know what we're entitled to.

The people who live and work downtown have been through a lot these past 18 months, but union officers are up to the challenge of restoring people's faith in the safety and security of downtown. Thank you for your commitment to good jobs and your investment in responsible contracting.

Thank you.

Kiara Deegan

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