



[Home](#) / [Council Documents](#)

349-2024

Communication

Request of Jessica Irvine to address Council regarding a thriving Rose City Self Defense

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A brief description of Communication: Thriving Rose city self defense - Reject proposes cuts - Add staffing to RCSD (Rose City Self Defense) budget

Agenda Items

349 Communications in [May 8, 2024 Council Agenda](https://www.portland.gov/council/agenda/2024/5/8) (<https://www.portland.gov/council/agenda/2024/5/8>)

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Requested Agenda Type

Communications

Date and Time Information

Requested Council Date

May 8, 2024

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Dear Mayor Wheeler and Commissioners

Re: Support and gratitude for Rose City Self Defense

I am writing this letter to you to express my strong support of Rose City Self-Defense. Cutting the program, as proposed by the Community Safety Division, would end a decades long program that is the only free empowerment-based women's self-defense class in the greater Portland area. I work as a Victim Services Specialist for the Portland Police Bureau however, let me make clear that I am not speaking on behalf of PPB. I know from my work that Rose City Self Defense supports some of our most vulnerable residents in Portland: sexual assault survivors, many of whom are disabled, are from historically disenfranchised groups, are young and economically stressed.

Did you know that every 68 seconds, a person experiences sexual assault in this country? Young people and teens are at highest risk of sexual assault, and the majority of victims are girls, women and those who identify as female. Unless a survivor is believed, respected and empowered, there can be lasting and insidious psychological harm. In addition, as I observe it, these incidents can have a destructive and disruptive effect on the rest of a person's life making learning, working and functioning difficult without support from friends, family and the community. Rose City Self-Defense steps into this space to offer classes that inform, empower, provide community, and hope.

Healing from sexual assault is not quick or linear. Yet being around empowering, empowered people like the dedicated volunteers and staff of this program can show a survivor that there is safety in the world and power to be reclaimed. This free class can empower a survivor to recover a sense of agency and help them make progress on their journey of healing. I work with victims of sexual assault and human trafficking and cutting it now would remove a tangible and relatively inexpensive source of support for people who need as much support as possible. Funds at the county level are scarce and often hard to access, state programs offer helpful but limited remedies, and therapy practices are filled to capacity. This leaves victims with few places to turn, few places to get support and fewer options for the many advocates in the community and in our systems to refer and recommend. There are so many barriers to getting help that traumatized survivors sometimes find it overwhelming to navigate and get discouraged by barrier after barrier. In my line of work, we work to minimize the trauma that systems and bureaucracies can inflict and knowing that we can share this with survivors is enormously helpful.

I know that the city is faced with difficult choices this year. I don't envy your responsibility. It is hard to put monetary value on the human spirit and healing, but here is my value proposition: In

exchange for the relatively low cost of running Rose City Self Defense, the City gets the value of helping hundreds of Portlanders each year rebuild their spirit and recover dignity, or learn skills that make them less vulnerable, therefore reducing risk of harm for all. Economics is not my expertise, but I think there is great value in the City playing a role in helping a survivor learn to defend themselves against the kind of person who harmed them so badly before.

Attending the classes offered by Rose City Self Defense can make a big difference in a survivor's life. It can be the little break, the little "give" from an otherwise unyielding and rigid system that gives something back that no one can take from you: some of your agency and dignity.

Please, do not take this from survivors and people who want to learn the skills to reduce the chance that they will be victimized. RCS's classes are available to girls as young as 11, to the disabled, are focused on BIPOC communities and are free. Classes are in depth, well-executed and empowering. CIS and trans women & girls and the LGBTQIA+ community are welcome. I know from experience as both as a survivor and an advocate the profound impact that self-defense classes can have.

RCS relies on a passionate and committed group of volunteer instructors to work with the community, and they have just launched a new class of 40 instructors. We refer survivors to this program on nearly a daily basis. Please keep this program going.

Thank you for considering my words as you continue to represent and lead the people of Portland.

Sincerely,

Jessica Irvine