

To: Members of the Oakland City Council and members of the Oakland Police Commission

Dear Council Members and Commissioners:

We urge you to support a local ordinance that empowers the Oakland Police Commission and City Council to protect our communities against unnecessary police militarization and requires transparency for the equipment that the Oakland Police Departments acquires and deploys.

The acquisition and use of military-grade equipment by civilian law enforcement agencies does not reduce crime,¹ but it does contribute to substantial fear in the community and a warrior mentality among officers. Several studies conclude that police departments that acquire military-grade equipment are more likely to use violence.²

Last year, Oakland police used a BearCat armored vehicle as a “shooting platform” for officers armed with AR-15 assault rifles. Police used this equipment to kill an unconscious man. During the 2011 Occupy protests, the OPD fired “specialty munitions” at Scott Olsen and other activists. Olsen suffered a fractured skull, and his injuries prompted a lawsuit that the City resolved with a \$4.5 million settlement. The OPD deploys military-grade equipment during public protests, parades, local street festivals, and while serving warrants.

There is almost no publicly-available information about what military-grade equipment OPD possesses or how it is used. There is no established process for community representatives to set policy for the equipment OPD should use moving forward, and there is little policy in place to provide oversight for the military-grade equipment that the OPD has already acquired.

It’s time for the community to know what equipment OPD has and have a say in whether and how it will be used. The proposed ordinance empowers the Police Commission to review and approve OPD requests for military-grade acquisitions, and mandates that the OPD submit use policies to the Commission for equipment that the department already has. Oakland has an equivalent ordinance for surveillance equipment that functions well. A similar ordinance on military equipment will provide the City Council, Police Commission and the public with important tools to oversee the police working in our neighborhoods and to place appropriate restrictions on counterproductive uses of militarized equipment.

Oakland has a chance to set a precedent for transparency in the use and acquisition of military-grade weapons for civilian law enforcement. We urge you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

Attachment: Draft Proposed Ordinance on Military Equipment

¹ Jonathan Mummolo, “Militarization fails to enhance police safety or reduce crime but may harm police reputation,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, September 11, 2018 (37) 9181-9186.

² Casey Delehanty, Jack Mewhirter, Ryan Welch and Jason Wilks, “Militarization and police violence: The case of the 1033 program,” *Research and Politics*, April-June 2017, 1-7; and Edward Lawson Jr., “Police Militarization and the Use of Lethal Force,” *Political Research Quarterly*, 2018, 1-13.

