



**CITY OF ROCHESTER
POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD**

80 Commercial Street
Rochester, New York 14614
(585) 428-7524
pab@cityofrochester.gov

**Shani Wilson
Chair**

March 5, 2021
For Release at 9:00 AM

PAB Statement on Portland Avenue Pepperspraying Incident

Last night, the Police Accountability Board reviewed body-worn camera footage of an arrest made on Portland Avenue on Monday, February 22. The footage shows a male officer attempting to arrest a woman who he believed may have stolen items from a drug store. After a brief conversation where the officer checks the woman's purse, the woman runs with her three year old to a nearby storefront. The officer tackles and peppersprays her as another male officer arrives and tries to pull the child away from her mother. After the woman is placed into the back of a police car, the officers confront a bystander who was filming the scene. One officer tells the bystander to, "Shut the hell up and get out of here." With the child crying inconsolably and screaming for her mother, an officer restraining the child persuades another to use a car to "block" the child from public view because, "It doesn't look good that I have to restrain, like, a three year old." While one officer says a call was made to the Family and Crisis Intervention Team, another officer says, "They said they're not even logged in yet." The footage does not appear to show any crisis team arriving on the scene before the woman was driven away in a police car.

The Police Accountability Board is disturbed by what it has seen. There are troubling parallels between this new incident and the one on Harris Street that occurred just a few weeks earlier. Both incidents involved Black mothers. Both involved Black children. Both involved Black people obviously in crisis. Both involved officers using pepperspray on or around a Black child. Both appear to have not involved the Person in Crisis Team, the Family and Crisis Intervention Team, or mental health professionals. Both involved police officers doing nothing to effectively de-escalate the situation. Both involved apparent intimidation of bystanders filming the incident. Without the courage of those bystanders, who were willing to stand up and hold the police accountable, both incidents may never have been brought to light. What is most troubling about this incident, however, is this: the two officers involved here were also involved in the earlier pepperspraying incident on Harris Street.

A month ago, we launched an investigation into the policies, practices, and procedures involved in the pepperspraying of a nine year old. These same policies, practices, and procedures are at issue in the videos we saw last night. For weeks, we have asked the City to provide us with RPD training manuals and slideshows regarding the use of pepperspray, the handling of children, and people in crisis. For weeks, we have asked the City to provide us with all training manuals and written directives that govern the use of the Person in Crisis and Family and Crisis Intervention teams. For weeks, we have asked the City to provide us with the full disciplinary and training histories of the officers on the scene – including the two officers involved in both the Harris Street and the Portland

Avenue incidents. The City has never provided us with this information or a host of other materials we requested. If the City had done otherwise, our investigation and any resulting proposals for change may have prevented this incident from happening.

These disturbing incidents prove that the Rochester Police Department needs to fundamentally change its organizational culture. These incidents also affirm our community's call to fundamentally reimagine public safety. To help make these changes, the City must fully cooperate with all our investigations. The City must also immediately release all body worn camera footage of this incident. Finally, there must be a public meeting with RPD leadership to discuss how we can work together to keep our children, our neighbors, and all Rochesterians safe.

Media inquiries can be directed to Executive Director Conor Dwyer Reynolds at conor.reynolds@cityofrochester.gov.