Amelia Carter Testimony

My name is Amelia Carter, I am a resident of 52nd Street and a member of Penn Community for Justice. On May 31, at about 3:30 PM, I returned to my home on Chancellor Street and was informed by neighbors that police were present en masse for an unknown reason. Suddenly I saw an elderly woman stumble onto the street who had been hit in the head by a rubber bullet. Dazed, she said she didn't understand why she had been shot. Still unclear about what was happening, I watched as a resident who was maimed by a rubber bullet, and others who struggled to breathe, emerge from the white smoke starting to gather on Walnut Street

Later in the afternoon, around 4:45 PM, I saw police officers fire tear gas and rubber bullets at people gathered on the 52nd Street corridor, which started a stampede. A tear gas canister flew over my head and landed one foot in front of me as I turned my back to run. As the gas billowed out and hit my face, seizing my lungs and stinging my eyes, I realized I couldn't breathe or see. A street medic helped flush my eyes with water. Even in the midst of fearing for my safety from police use of excessive and indiscriminate force, I was worried about COVID-19 exposure, as I had to remove my now soiled mask and was being coughed on by people in the same condition.

As the police continued to shoot gas, I tried to run home to escape the scene, but, as I turned onto Chancellor, gas canisters were released on the residential street, thus hitting me with tear gas again. When I finally reached my home, it was full of tear gas, forcing me to go back outside. The PPD armored vehicles continued moving south on 52nd Street, firing tear gas onto other residential blocks. I witnessed neighbors incapacitated by gas due to bad asthma reactions. It wasn't cops who helped neighbors yelling in the street for assistance. It was other neighbors who were struggling to breathe themselves who came to their aid.

At around 6PM, I saw police return to Chestnut Street, where they released more tear gas at residents on Walnut Street who presented no threat. Throughout the seven-hour police occupation, I never heard or saw the police attempt to communicate with us or warn us before using tear gas or rubber bullets. I was terrified by what I witnessed that day. It was clear that the Philadelphia Police Department believed they were at war with us. In the name of "protecting" us and our property, they were willing to create a battleground between unarmed residents and they, the militarized police force. Although they arrived on the scene before any looting took place, they didn't prevent any destruction of property and only served to endanger human lives.

Today, I am demanding with many people here that the Philadelphia Police Department be forced to demilitarize and be systematically defunded. It is clear they aren't capable of protecting or serving this city. I am disgusted to know that, as a taxpayer, this is how my contribution is being spent. I am deeply saddened to see that, despite history-making protests demanding justice by way of defunding police, the city council overwhelmingly voted to maintain the bloated police budget. I question the efficacy of processes like these when in action those we vote into office don't have our backs. I want to know what exactly can be done to defund the PPD and institute police-free alternatives to public safety.