

**Joint HPCC & HPCDC Statement on
The Pittsburgh Department of Public Safety's Open Air Firing Range
April 25, 2021**

Going back to at least the 1980s, the City of Pittsburgh Police Department has operated an open-air firing range in the woods on the eastern hillside above Washington Boulevard. While it may have appeared to the city to be an unobtrusive location at the time, the problems with this location have become increasingly obvious over time. With the firing range in an elevated location, the topography results in there being no acoustic barrier between it and much of Highland Park, including the public swimming pool, volleyball courts, off leash dog park, several pavilions, Farmhouse Playground, and well over 100 homes. Additionally, because of acoustics, the sound travels and can be heard (although not as loudly) in over half of Highland Park and as far away as Morningside, Stanton Heights, and Aspinwall.

For at least 40 years, residents of Highland Park and other East End neighborhoods, and Highland Park visitors, have been regularly exposed to the jarring sound of rapid, repetitive gun fire. When in use, gun fire can be heard intermittently as early as 7 am and as late as 9 pm. The firing range is primarily used during the week, but sometimes also on weekends; last year gunfire was heard from the range on Thanksgiving Day. In the parts of Highland Park listed above, the noise can be loud enough to prevent conversation. Residents complain that they cannot enjoy their yard or keep their windows open. People with PTSD have reported being retraumatized, including one family that has had to spend several nights at a hotel to escape the noise; other families have sold their homes and moved. Park users report that they, their children, and their pets are unnerved by the noise.

The Highland Park community understands and supports the need for proper firearm training for city police officers. Indeed, for most of the neighborhood's history with the range, going back to the late 80's, neighbors have tried to work with the city to find a solution. The neighborhood has been remarkably patient - reports have been promised, options for new facilities mentioned, limited hours discussed - yet the facility remains open and operations unchanged.

At the same time, the medical and scientific communities have come to understand that there are real and significant costs to living with noise of this type. It is no longer viewed as an annoyance, but rather as a public health risk. The EPA states, "*Studies have shown that there are direct links between noise and health. Problems related to noise include stress related illnesses, high blood pressure, speech interference, hearing loss, sleep disruption, and lost productivity.*" Such public health impacts have only increased in the past year with more people working from home and seeking respite in the park.

The significant burden placed on those who live and recreate within earshot of the firing range - which appears to be the only outdoor municipal firing range located within the city limits of a major American city - can no longer be considered acceptable for the city or its residents. It would never be allowed in this location today and remains only because the city only considers the operational costs which are essentially nothing. The city has never considered the significant costs it imposes on neighbors and park users. We hope to work with elected officials at the local and state level to ensure this issue is addressed once and for all, with a comprehensive solution that meets the needs of residents, park visitors, and the police.