



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 3

COUNCILMEMBER KSHAMA SAWANT

Tuesday August 13, 2019

Seattle Police Chief Best and ML King County Prosecutor Satterberg:

I was appalled to learn that Seattle Police last Friday, August 9, handcuffed and arrested a 13-year-old middle school student and climate justice activist who was engaging in a peaceful *Fridays for the Future* demonstration outside Seattle City Hall to call attention to the growing climate crisis.

I understand that the student activist inadvertently and accidentally spray-painted part of the wall outside City Hall, genuinely believing she was using easily-erasable chalk. She and her fellow activists were sincerely in the process of taking steps to remove the paint as soon as they realized it wasn't chalk, when Seattle Police arrived on the scene, stopped her from fixing the problem, ordered her to sit down, handcuffed and arrested her, and took her to the West Precinct.

I believe any reasonable person who watches [the video of the student being arrested](#) will conclude that this was completely unjustified. As one of the witnesses reported on social media, rather than support the young people who were working to clean up the paint, Seattle Police "sent 5 SUVs, sirens blaring, and multiple bike cops to cuff & haul off [a] crying 13 year old."

I am, unfortunately, not surprised at these egregious and completely unnecessary actions by the Police Department - something communities of color disproportionately experience. Nonetheless, I am outraged that the Department chose to terrify a middle school student and peaceful activist in this manner.

As one of the student activists expressed to my Council Office, "the level of escalation was not necessary" and "scaring children who were already contrite and trying to figure out a solution did not help us feel safe."

What makes the Police Department's actions particularly galling is the fact that these peaceful young activists are helping build a movement to address the climate catastrophe that faces human society. The 20 warmest years on record occurred during the last 22

years. We're seeing an alarming regularity of extreme weather events, from wildfires across Washington State and in California, heat waves across the world, to a new normal of "once-in-a-lifetime" storms super-charged by global warming.

I believe Seattle Police and Chief Best owe the activist and the rest of the city an explanation as to why this took place and how they could possibly feel this shameful action served the cause of public safety. I believe an apology is owed to this courageous 13-year-old student. I am also writing this letter to urge the County Prosecutor's office to publicly and immediately announce they will not press charges.

I salute the young people who have organized the weekly *Friday for Future* protests, starting last December. Their leadership, as that of Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Sunrise Movement nationally, has ignited a renewed movement for a Green New Deal to urgently address the dire climate situation with radical and bold policy. With a climate-change-denying billionaire in the White House - who boasts a cabinet full of fossil fuel advocates - and a US Congress filled with corporate politicians doggedly serving big business interests, we need young people and working people to lead in the immediate action necessary to avoid climate catastrophe. The role of Seattle's young people especially underscores the continued stark failure of a political establishment beholden to big business interests - locally, nationally, and globally - to address the crisis.

I urge community members to come out in big numbers to Seattle City Hall Plaza (4th and James) this coming Friday, August 16, at 1:00PM to stand in solidarity with the dedicated young people who are helping lead the way on climate justice.

Sincerely,



Councilmember Kshama Sawant