

Erik Kvarsten, Gresham City Manager
Testimony regarding SB 501, the East Metro Gang Enforcement Team
Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee
March 10, 2015

Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to testify on behalf of the East Metro Gang Enforcement Team. My name is Erik Kvarsten, and I have served as the City Manager of Gresham for over 10 years, and prior to that I served as the City Manager of Troutdale.

This funding is critically important to Gresham's ability to control gang activity and maintain public safety and livability. Normally we would have our Chief of Police and our Gang Prevention Advisor here to testify as well, but they are both currently in Washington DC, along with our partners at Multnomah County, getting technical assistance from the Federal Government, learning how to do a better job with lower level youth offenses.

Their absence is a perfect example of the growth we have had in just the past couple of years in prevention, outreach, and intervention, which dramatically complement our traditional and vital gang enforcement efforts.

It is no secret that the number of people in poverty grew by 148.5 percent in Gresham between 2000 and 2012, a period when our citywide population only increased 17.6 percent. Our community has experienced dramatic change, transforming from a rural and suburban environment into a very urban community, complete with a new host of law enforcement challenges, including significant challenges with gang activity. State support through funding for the East Metro Gang Enforcement Team has been a critical component to our ability to react to those urban law enforcement challenges since 2005.

The East Metro Gang Enforcement Team is collaborative and multi-jurisdictional. Under the leadership of Gresham Sergeant Dave Schmidt, here with us today, the East Metro Gang Enforcement Team includes two other Gresham police officers, as well as officers from the City of Fairview, the City of Troutdale, and two Multnomah County deputies. The team also works in close partnership with Portland's Gang Enforcement Team, often dealing with the same gang-affected or gang-affiliated individuals.

In addition to solid enforcement work, we have taken substantial measures to improve our outreach, prevention, intervention and youth engagement services. We have added two civilian outreach workers who provide positive intervention for at-risk youth. This service is provided through a partnership with the Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center, which President and CEO, Joe McFerrin, will describe in greater detail. In addition, we have successfully leveraged partnerships to add late night basketball for at-risk youth, student mindfulness training to teach stress-coping skills, and programs to

assist out-of-school and unemployed gang-impacted youth with GED preparation, resume workshops, and job placement.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony today for this important service. The East Metro Gang Enforcement Team is one of our most critical dedicated units, and serves in one of the most important areas of law enforcement for our community. Truly, the Legislature's vision in providing this funding has enabled us to creating a comprehensive local, state, federal, and non-profit partnership that addresses gang issues with every critical element: prevention, youth engagement, outreach, enforcement, and effective prosecutions and youth justice.