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Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center
Testimony regarding SB 501, the East Metro Gang Enforcement Team
Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee
March 10, 2015

Senator Gelser and members of the Committee, I am Joe McFerrin II, President/CEO of Portland OIC and Rosemary Anderson High School. I am honored to provide testimony on behalf of the East Metro Gang Enforcement Team.

In 1983, Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center established an alternative high school at the request of Portland Public Schools to accommodate disadvantaged youth who were failing in the public school system. More than 30 years later, we continue the work of reconnecting at-risk youth with their education through our three Rosemary Anderson High School campuses, and with career training in collaboration with our community partners. We mentor and support our graduates as they pursue a post-secondary education and career up to age 25.

For most youth, the school's small size and one-on-one attention from staff is critical for their ability to engage. We have an 86% graduation rate for high school students who enroll and attend our schools.

In addition to our education, employment, and family services, POIC offers street level gang outreach services throughout Multnomah County. In partnership with the Gresham Police Department, we employ two full-time outreach workers in East Multnomah County. These experienced individuals are challenged with engaging at-risk and gang involved youth - to build trusting relationships, and direct them towards positive activities. Outreach workers assist youth in non-traditional settings such as parks, street corners, and at MAX stops during hours when violence is most likely to occur, particularly evenings and weekends, as data indicates.

Street Level Gang Outreach workers must maintain a delicate balance: while they communicate regularly with the East Metro Gang Enforcement Team, too close a

connection with law enforcement could diminish their ability to gain and maintain trust with youth and young adults. Our partnership with EMGET is vital to POIC's holistic approach to serving at-risk youth and families. Outreach workers are often called to the scene of gang and youth related crimes to help calm down witnesses, families, and community members. Often their actions after such a crime will help deter future violence. East Metro Gang Enforcement Team officers may also refer gang-impacted youth to the services of gang outreach, who will then help those youth connect to positive activities.

Over the past year, POIC has also had the opportunity to partner with the City of Gresham on a number of new gang prevention projects funded by the Oregon Youth Development Council. Our student mindfulness program, for example, is helping our students learn how to cope with stress and avoid violence through yoga and meditation. We have also started a new late-night basketball program to engage at-risk youth in a positive activity on Friday nights when gang crime is prevalent. These programs are having an immediate impact on our community's at-risk youth, and we look forward to continuing our partnership with the City of Gresham and the East Metro Gang Enforcement Team in providing a comprehensive approach to gang activity spanning from prevention through suppression.

The police know they can't solve this problem with suppression alone. Likewise, we know we can't solve the problem only through prevention and intervention services. But with the right combination of these strategies, and by working together, we have an opportunity to ensure that gang violence does not come to define East Multnomah County.