

Senator Sara Gelser, Chair
Senate Committee on Human Services

Chair Gelser and members of the Committee:

My name is Nathan Vasquez, and I am a Deputy District Attorney for Multnomah County. District Attorney Rod Underhill asked me to testify today in support of SB 140, on behalf of the importance of the East Metro Gang Enforcement Team, and to express the issues we see with the growth of gang activity in East Multnomah County.

I have prosecuted cases in Multnomah County for 17 years, the majority of which I've spent prosecuting cases in Gresham and East Multnomah County. EMGET has been an essential partner during that time. Cases investigated by EMGET have included gang homicides, gang shootings, gang assaults, kidnappings, major theft organizations, human trafficking crimes, child abuse, child homicides, juvenile gang-related crimes, and misdemeanors. This past year I prosecuted several members of a violent gang which operates in the Gresham Rockwood area. The gang had attacked a family with knives and a gun inside of the family home and nearly killed the father. With the expertise, dedication, and hard work of EMGET the state was successful at trial and violent gang members were held accountable, are now off the streets, and in prison where they belong.

As a prosecutor for these cases, I can say that, without the organization, cross-jurisdictional collaboration, gang-enforcement expertise, and singular focus brought by EMGET, we wouldn't be anywhere close to as effective as we are now at disrupting gang infrastructure, protecting the public, and administering justice. This investment from the Legislature pays an enormous dividend in effectiveness, helping reduce a statewide infrastructure of gangs, narcotics, and violence.

Over time, I have witnessed the migration of gang issues out of inner Portland, where they were concentrated in the 1990s into mid and east Multnomah County. As a result, EMGET's importance has only increased. In addition, gang behavior, culture, and criminal activity has shifted and changed throughout the years, further increasing the necessity of specialized units like EMGET in order to ensure that law enforcement strategies address the current and changing trends. Without that focused expertise, prosecuting these cases and bringing offenders to justice would be even more difficult.

I strongly urge the Committee to continue its support for SB 140. This is a small investment, on scale, with tremendous outcomes, the positive outcomes of which have statewide benefits.

Regards,

ROD UNDERHILL
District Attorney
Multnomah County Oregon

By:
Nathan Vasquez
Deputy District Attorney