



June 10, 2021

Senate President Peter Courtney
Speaker of the House Tina Kotek
Senator Betsy Johnson
Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward
Representative Dan Rayfield
Oregon State Legislature

President Courtney, Speaker Kotek, Senator Johnson, Senator Steiner Hayward, and Representative Rayfield:

As legislators serving East Multnomah County, we write to you in strong support of \$2 million for the 2021-23 biennium to provide outreach, prevention, and intervention services that will reduce gun violence in our districts. We urge the Legislature to invest in the City of Gresham's East Metro Outreach, Prevention, and Intervention (OPI) program.

Gun violence is a growing crisis in our communities. Gresham experienced 54 shootings in 2020—up from 33 shootings in 2019—and **so far in 2021, the number of shootings in Gresham has doubled compared to this time last year.** Shootings create trauma not just for the people directly involved, but also for the surrounding neighborhoods and community. Often, the communities most impacted by gun violence are also communities that have suffered from a history of underinvestment.

There is consensus among local leaders, service providers, and communities of color that investments must be made to prevent increasing violence in East Multnomah County, and that these services should be directly provided by culturally responsive partners. Gresham's proposed East Metro OPI program would invest in partnerships with trusted community organizations like New Avenues for Youth, Latino Network, IRCO, POIC, Beyond Black CDC, and others to provide social services, youth programs, and education to improve public safety outcomes and meaningfully impact quality of life for Oregonians in need.

The Youth Development Division of the Oregon Department of Education (YDD) has stated that the OPI program is an appropriate fit for its statutory mandate to reduce and prevent youth violence and gang activity. YDD has the expertise to support program implementation, and to implement tracking and evaluation infrastructure with measurable outcomes to ensure the effectiveness and accountability of the program.

The OPI program would serve a young, diverse, and economically disadvantaged community in our districts. There are more than 29,000 residents under the age of twenty in Gresham, and thirty-six percent of the population are residents of color. Research from the Oregon

Employment Department shows that East Multnomah County has the highest concentration of poverty in the state. The majority of students in Gresham are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and more than twenty percent of households city-wide receive federal food assistance.

The City of Gresham’s ability to address these community needs is compromised by a permanent property tax rate of \$3.61 per \$1,000 Taxable Assessed Value, one of the lowest of any full-service city in Oregon. This means that on a per capita basis, Gresham’s property tax revenue is less than half of other Oregon cities of comparable size. Gresham relies on collaboration at the regional, county, and state level for investments to address historic underinvestment in East Multnomah County.

The pandemic and economic crisis have only worsened these systemic inequities and disproportionately impacted Gresham residents: five of the six zip codes with the highest COVID case rates in the Portland Metro area are located within Gresham. As our constituents work to recover from the pandemic, it will be vitally important for East Multnomah County children to have access to programs that reduce isolation and build community. The City of Gresham has the staff expertise and strong existing relationships with local, culturally responsive community organizations necessary to deliver the activities and services that East Multnomah County youth need.

We believe that the East Metro OPI program will help to fulfill our duty as legislators to strengthen our communities and improve the lives of our constituents. We urge your support for this state investment to reduce gun violence and improve outcomes for youth in East Multnomah County.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Sen. Chris Gorsek
Senate District 25



Rep. Zach Hudson
House District 49



Rep. Ricki Ruiz
House District 50



Rep. Janelle Bynum
House District 51



Rep. Andrea Valderrama
House District 47



Sen. Kayse Jama
Senate District 24



Sen. Michael Dembrow
Senate District 23



Rep. Khanh Pham
House District 46



Rep. Anna Williams
House District 5