

June 3, 2021

Senate President Peter Courtney
Speaker of the House Tina Kotek
Senator Betsy Johnson
Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward
Representative Dan Rayfield
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for Gresham's Opportunity, Prevention, and Intervention Program

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

State investment is essential to reduce gun violence in East Multnomah County. For this reason, we strongly support the City of Gresham's request for \$2 million in funding for the 2021-23 biennium to implement outreach, violence prevention, and intervention services, and urge the legislature to invest in the East Metro OPI program. As community-based partners, we work closely every day with youth and families in our community. Building relationships, providing healthy and safe alternatives to violence, and intervening with the resources families need—this is what works.

Shootings create trauma for the people directly involved, as well as for the surrounding neighborhood and community. **In 2021, the number of shootings in Gresham has doubled compared to this time last year.** We recognize that the communities most impacted by gun violence are also communities that have suffered from a history of underinvestment. The issues that lead to increased violence are complex, and the solutions require investments for the youth in our community. Propelled by these difficult realities, and with added urgency as the incidences of community violence continue to rise, we must act now.

There is consensus among local leaders, service providers, and communities of color that investments must be made to prevent increasing violence in Gresham communities, and that these services should be directly provided by culturally responsive partners. Gresham's proposed OPI program presents an opportunity for the Oregon Legislature to demonstrate the effectiveness of investing upstream in social services, youth programs, and education as a way to both improve public safety outcomes and meaningfully impact the quality of life of Oregonians in need. Despite the significant challenges they confront daily, or perhaps because of them, East Multnomah County's youth have incredible heart, vitality, ambition, strength, and talent. They deserve the opportunity to thrive.

Should the Legislature appropriate the requested funding for Gresham's OPI program, the Youth Development Division of the Oregon Department of Education (YDD) has stated that the program is an appropriate fit for its work and aligns with its statutory mandate. YDD has the experience and expertise to support program implementation, and to provide technical assistance to develop and implement tracking and evaluation infrastructure and measurable outcomes. We are excited about our potential partnership with the State of Oregon and the City of Gresham as we all work together towards solutions

for gun violence and historic inequities. By combining Gresham's unique ability to serve as an East Multnomah County convener with a right-sized investment in services, community organizations will be able to work together more effectively to meet the community's needs. The OPI program can change lives.

Sincerely,

