



VOICES UNITED.  
OPPORTUNITY REIMAGINED.

February 28, 2022

Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for Investment in Community Violence Intervention Programs

Dear Chair Steiner Hayward, Chair Sanchez, Vice-Chair Girod,  
Vice-Chair Gomberg, Vice-Chair Smith, and Members of the Committee

Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is advancing equitable policymaking and whole-child advocacy statewide to ensure our children and youth have what they need, regardless of their race or where they live, to thrive by activating meaningful change for children and families. OCO is the result of the merger between two historic Oregon non-profits: The Children's Trust Fund of Oregon and Children First for Oregon. We collect, analyze, and elevate data and research that, alongside lived experience, drives conversations in support of Oregon's future. We partner alongside ~120 statewide organizations through The Children's Agenda to uplift and advocate for community-driven, equity-centered policies and investments that will improve the lives of Oregon's children and families.

**We write in support of the Budget Request to Invest in Community Violence Intervention Programs, which is part of the 2022 Children's Agenda.** Oregon has confronted a dual public health crisis as gun violence has surged alongside the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2019 and 2020, the state's murder rate increased by 16%. Last year was one of the deadliest years in recent Oregon history, with 90 homicides total.

Gun violence is not only confined to metropolitan areas. Gun suicide, which accounts for more than 81 of the gun deaths in Oregon every year, is prevalent in suburban and rural areas. There is also a substantial financial strain related to gun violence, with high costs incurred across health care, law enforcement, and criminal justice. Each year gun violence costs Oregon \$3.3 billion, although these high costs do not capture the toll of the lives stolen, the trauma young people carry, the fear of becoming a victim of violence, or the long-term impacts felt by communities grappling with gun violence.

Children are harmed in numerous ways when they are exposed to gun violence. They are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, perform worse

## The Children's Agenda

*is a broad slate of equitable investments and policy solutions to meet the holistic needs of Oregon children, youth, and their families.*



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at school, and suffer from detrimental impacts on their psychological and mental wellbeing. When communities and schools are not safe from gun violence, entire generations of children are affected.

There is an urgent need to combat this public health crisis, through evidence-informed strategies and models to reduce gun violence and youth criminal system involvement. State governments play an important role in addressing the root causes of violence and investing in lasting solutions such as violence intervention programs.

Investing \$15 million to community violence intervention programs allows these systems to apply a localized approach in reducing gun violence across Oregon's hardest-hit neighborhoods. Even amid another surge of COVID-19, local gun violence intervention groups have continued to interrupt the cycle of gun violence in communities while facing unprecedented challenges and limited resources. We must invest in the health, safety, and resilience of our communities and reduce the devastating gun violence that Oregon has experienced over the last few years. We urge you to support the investment in community violence intervention programs. Thank you for your time and consideration.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Ivy Major-McDowall, Policy and Advocacy Manager

Jenifer Wagley, CEO/Executive Director

Ivana Dang, Policy Intern

*View the 2022 Children's Agenda at*  
[www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2022-childrens-agenda](http://www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2022-childrens-agenda)