

To: Joint Committee on Ways & Means, Oregon Senate

From: Robert Northman, activist, scholar, community organizer, convict, and gang member

On Behalf of: Save The Gang, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit

RE: Letter in support of renewal of Community Violence Intervention Grant funds, SB5506

Date: April 7, 2023

Dear Committee Member Senators,

My name is Robert Northman and I live in Portland, Oregon, where I was also born and raised. I have a bachelor's degree in Social Science with a minor in Civic Leadership. I am a community organizer and volunteer, and I am a grad student at Portland State University where I'm studying to earn a Master of Urban Studies degree. I also identify as a convict and a gang member.

As both a past-participant and survivor of ongoing violence related to the culture of violence in the city's streets, I urge the members of this committee to renew Oregon's Community Violence Intervention funds that are administered by the Oregon DOJ's Victim and Survivor Services Division. I've experienced the violence personally and I want to help kill the violence.

Violence in Portland is at record-levels, and we cannot afford to ignore the issue. The trouble we experience as a community cannot and should not be approached solely as a law enforcement matter. The cycle of violence is directly related to underlying community conditions and generational distrust of criminal justice system-partnerships who are primarily charged with creating solutions but tend to prefer imprisonment despite it being an unsustainable approach. By supporting funding for evidence-informed community-based violence intervention approaches, the State will have invested in communities that are ready and willing to help, but who cannot effectively address the issue without much needed resources.

The initial \$15 million appropriated for CVI is not enough. This funding will expire in 2024 and once that money is dispersed, although it will have contributed greatly to the multitude of projects and programs that are in dire need of resources, without a long-term commitment of funds to continue the services at the front line of this issue, the programs built up with these initial funds will face collapse or plain ineffectiveness.

Once again, I urge this committee to find a way to include in future budgets the continuation of funds that will support the work being done by those in the community who are closest to the violence and closest to those who are survivors of and participants in the violence.

I want to thank those in support of the life-saving programs funded by the current CVI grants and urge those who are undecided to please consider the consequences of violence worsening.

Robert Northman.