

Submitter: Elyse Foster
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

My name is Elyse Foster and I live in Southeast Portland.

I am here to urge you to renew Oregon's \$15 million Community Violence Intervention fund, which is administered by DOJ's Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division, in this year's budget.

Last year, Oregon appropriated \$15 million to fund these services for the very first time, and we know there is already more demand than funding available. The funding is set to expire in 2024. If we want to reduce gun violence over the long term in Oregon, we can't make a one-time investment in these programs. They require a sustained commitment to evidence-based strategies that reduce violence.

As a mother, grandmother and physician and most recently a gun safety advocate, I can only be grateful that I have not been personally impacted by gun violence. And yet, it seems more and more inescapable, and hopefully, not inevitable. On July 4, while I walked to the neighborhood parade in Eastmoreland, the news flashed on my phone about the tragedy in Highland Park III, a town where some of my closest friends live – 3 hours later I learned they were safe. My son and his family live a few blocks from Cleveland High School, where a shooting took place on December 12, 2022 – what will their children face when they attend high school?. So, I feel that have we just been fortunate so far to have “dodged these bullets.” With the news of each tragedy, each mass shooting, I steel myself and fight the impulse to become immune to the horror. And so I'm here to give testimony.

The number one cause of child mortality in the United States is now gun violence, surpassing auto accidents and childhood illness. A new horrifying statistic that one in 5 children born today in the US will die by the age of 40, much of this mortality due to gun violence. In Portland, 2022 was record year for gun violence, the worst in over 30 years, with over 100 homicides. Oregon as a whole has the dubious distinction of having a higher than average rate of suicides by firearm; in fact two congressional districts had more than 100 gun suicides. Suicide rates in children have risen.

While many different approaches are needed to improve gun safety, local gun violence intervention groups have been shown to interrupt the cycle of gun violence in their communities. In Multnomah county, “violence interrupters” build relationships with those who are at risk to commit violence and those at risk to be victims. In building these relationships, they address the substrate that fuels violence. Grants in Oregon support many other types of violence intervention including veteran suicide prevention programs in Eastern and Southern Oregon.

How do we know these programs work? Recent data gathered by the Center for Gun Violence Solutions at Johns Hopkins University demonstrated significant reductions in the homicide and gun injury rates in Baltimore neighborhoods where Safe Streets Programs were implemented. This research group also found that these programs

are cost-effective because gun violence is so expensive. They estimated that there was between \$7 and \$19 saved for every \$1 invested in Safe Streets . Community violence intervention programs face unprecedented challenges, and one of the most immediate things that policymakers can do is ensure they continue to have the resources they need to perform their life-saving work.

Thank you for providing support for these live-saving programs in the state budget.

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