

Submitter: Andrew Hall
On Behalf Of: Salem
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1015

Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislative Assembly,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1015, which mandates the Department of Justice to establish a grant program aimed at reducing community violence through funding eligible entities such as community-based organizations and tribes. While the intent to reduce violence is commendable, I believe this bill misdirects valuable resources toward a superficial approach that fails to address the root causes of community violence. Instead, I urge you to redirect these funds to bolster mental health services, which would provide a far more effective and sustainable solution to the issue.

SB 1015 allocates moneys to entities tasked with developing, implementing, and expanding "evidence-informed" violence reduction and prevention services. However, the bill's broad allowances—covering administration, capacity building, training, and even stipends—suggest a significant portion of these funds will be spent on bureaucratic overhead and studies rather than direct action. The creation of an oversight board and annual reporting requirements further divert resources into evaluation and discussion, rather than tangible outcomes. This approach risks becoming a costly exercise in documentation and analysis, with little guarantee of addressing the underlying drivers of violence.

Community violence, as defined in the bill, involves intentional, interpersonal acts often linked to deeper societal issues—chief among them, untreated mental health conditions. Research consistently shows that mental illness, when unaddressed, can contribute to violent behavior, particularly in high-stress environments where access to care is limited. Oregon faces a well-documented mental health crisis, with insufficient funding for psychiatric care, counseling, and crisis intervention services. By investing in mental health infrastructure—such as increasing the number of available therapists, expanding access to affordable treatment, and enhancing early intervention programs—we could tackle a primary root cause of violence head-on, rather than funding groups to merely study its symptoms.

The bill's exclusion of law enforcement entities from eligibility is another concern. While I understand the intent to prioritize community-led solutions, this restriction overlooks the practical reality that police often encounter individuals in crisis who need immediate mental health support, not incarceration. Pairing law enforcement with robust mental health resources could create a more integrated and effective response than the fragmented grant system proposed here.

Consider the potential impact of redirecting these funds. A single dollar spent on mental health treatment can prevent escalation, reduce recidivism, and save lives—offering a measurable return on investment. In contrast, SB 1015's emphasis on "evidence-informed" services and administrative frameworks lacks clarity on how success will be achieved or measured beyond reports and oversight meetings. Communities experiencing "disproportionately high rates of community violence" deserve solutions that heal, not studies that prolong the status quo.

I respectfully urge you to reject SB 1015 and instead prioritize legislation that allocates these funds to expand mental health services across Oregon. By addressing the root causes of violence—rather than funding groups to analyze its effects—we can create safer, healthier communities for all Oregonians.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Andrew Hall
Salem, Oregon