

Submitter: Jennifer Gunter

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1015

I OPPOSE Senate Bill 1015, proposing a Department of Justice (DOJ)-administered grant program to reduce community violence, DUPLICATES existing efforts, introduces inequities, and risks violating constitutional principles. While its intent to address violence in disproportionately impacted communities is commendable, a critical examination reveals significant FLAWS warranting opposition!

First, SB 1015 overlaps with Oregon's existing frameworks, such as the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission's grant programs and the Oregon Health Authority's violence prevention initiatives. These entities already fund community-based organizations and tribes for violence reduction, including firearm-related interventions. The bill's focus on "evidence-informed" services mirrors current programs like the Youth Violence Prevention Grants, creating redundancy. Adding another layer of bureaucracy through the DOJ is diluting resources and complicating oversight without clear evidence of enhanced outcomes.

Disparities arise in the bill's eligibility and prioritization. By excluding law enforcement entities—key players in community safety—SB 1015 creates an uneven playing field, favoring certain organizations over others with proven capacity. The vague criteria for "disproportionately high rates of community violence" lack specificity, potentially leading to arbitrary funding decisions that favor urban areas over rural ones, despite rural Oregon's rising violence rates. This geographic inequity could neglect smaller, under-resourced communities, contradicting the bill's equity goals. Additionally, prioritizing grants based on subjective "likelihood of reducing violence" risks bias, potentially sidelining minority-led organizations lacking institutional polish but serving critical needs.

Constitutional concerns further undermine SB 1015. The bill's targeted funding for communities with "disproportionately high" violence rates may violate the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment and Article I, Section 20 of the Oregon Constitution, which mandate equal treatment under the law. WITHOUT rigorous, specific evidence of past discrimination tied to these communities—as REQUIRED by legal precedent like *City of Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co.* (1989)—this race-conscious allocation can be struck down as unconstitutional. Oregon's own history, such as the 2020 Oregon Cares Fund debate, highlights this risk, where similar race-based funding faced legal scrutiny for lacking sufficient justification.

Finally, the oversight board's composition—while inclusive—lacks mandated

representation from all affected stakeholders, such as rural voices or law enforcement, risking an unrepresentative echo chamber. This could skew grant evaluations, perpetuating inefficiencies and inequities.

SB 1015's redundancies burden taxpayers, its disparities undermine fairness, and its constitutional vulnerabilities invite legal challenges. Oregon should refine existing programs rather than erect a flawed new structure. I urge the rejection of this bill and pursue more equitable, legally sound alternatives.

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