

Canby Police Chief Urges Voters to Consider Child Abuse Levy

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Canby Police Chief Bret Smith is urging voters to consider the new Clackamas Children's Safety Levy, which will appear on the ballot this November, and what it could mean for the prevention, investigation and successful prosecution for crimes against children.

Chief Smith came to the Canby Police Department almost a decade ago after a long career with the Portland Police Bureau, where he spent a number of years in the child abuse division.

“I didn't want to do child abuse work,” Smith, a father of four, told *The Canby Current*. “But I woke up one morning and felt like I had these little voices in my head saying, ‘I know this is really hard for you because it's nasty stuff, but it's really hard for us, too, and we need someone to advocate for us.’”

“There's a real reluctance from a lot of law enforcement officers to go into child abuse work, but it's so important.”

Smith was part of the push to create a dedicated Child Abuse Team within the PPB, which is now housed within the Family Services Division on the corner of 103rd and Burnside.

This work continues to have a big impact on the way he thinks about law enforcement, the chief said. That's why he is particularly interested in the safety levy, a five-year levy of 15 cents per \$1,000 in assessed valuation, which would fund proven local programs and services that help prevent child abuse and support victims who have been impacted by it.

Because this is a new levy and not a renewal, it will cause property taxes to increase — perhaps by more than 3%. The owner of a home valued at \$300,000 would pay approximately \$45.30 more in taxes per year over the course of the five-year levy.

If approved, the levy would raise approximately \$7.9 million in the 2021-22 fiscal year; \$8.2 million in 2022-23; \$8.4 million in 2023-24; \$8.7 million in 2024-25; and \$8.9 million in 2025-26.

“Every dollar from this levy will stay in Clackamas County to service and support child abuse survivors and prevent further abuse,” Smith said.

There are proven programs and services in the county that protect children from trauma, abuse and neglect, and that help create a safe and resilient community for children and

youth, he said.

“But much more can and needs to be done,” he added. “Having a stable funding source to address these issues are essential if the delivery of those services are to be done.”

Although the economic downturn and high unemployment this year — stemming from the coronavirus pandemic — has made any tax increase (even a temporary one) a tougher sell, the pandemic has also made the need for dedicated funding all the more critical.

Domestic violence cases have increased by 60% since the onset of Covid-19, Smith said, and that is despite the loss of many of the situations in which a victim of child abuse might have the opportunity to disclose their experiences to a mandatory reporter — such as school and extracurricular activities.

“We have been getting a lot of referrals from the county Child Services Department,” said the chief. “Our detectives spend a lot of time following up on and looking into those. We get them every day; sometimes two or three, sometimes seven or eight.”

If approved, funds raised by the levy would go to community-based nonprofit agencies providing direct services to Clackamas County residents. Providers must work with victims and/or children and youth impacted by trauma, or have a program with specific goals and objectives to serve victims within an agency.

Service providers must meet performance measures, monitoring requirements and provide annual progress reports. A county-appointed citizen advisory and oversight committee will review levy fund distribution.

After five years, the levy would expire unless voters agree to continue it. The ballot measure was referred to voters for the November 2020 general election by the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners.

The Clackamas Child’s Safety Levy, ballot measure 3-564, is supported by a number of local officials, including Canby School Board members Angi Dilkes and Mike Zagya, as well as parents and survivors of child abuse. Find their statements in [the Clackamas County Voters’ Pamphlet](#) (no arguments were submitted in opposition).

More information is also available on the website of Yes On 3-564, yesforclackamaskids.org.