

Clackamas Children's Safety Levy deserves broad support

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Pamela White



Measure 3-564 is designed specifically to serve children and youth impacted by violence, neglect and abuse

One thing I've learned in 2020 is that our worlds can turn upside down at any moment. Since March, our

communities have endured a series of hardships — from a global pandemic that forced us to rethink the ways we interact with each other to devastating wildfires that forced us from our homes. Crises such as these hit us all pretty hard, none harder than our most vulnerable neighbors, including our county's children and youth.

Before the pandemic, the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) estimated that thousands of children in Clackamas County were suspected victims of violence, abuse and neglect. Since then, local law enforcement and local social service organizations have seen a dramatic increase in these incidents and are confident that they will continue to rise in the wake of the most recent horrific fires that displaced our communities. The bottom line is that Clackamas County's need for children's safety services has never been greater.

As the parent of a child who has survived abuse at the hands of a caretaker, I know what it's like to see a child struggle with the trauma of such events. It was devastating to watch our then 3-year-old detail how she was abused by a babysitter. It was heart-wrenching to witness my child weep silently through the required invasive medical exam. I felt helpless when my child resorted to self-harm to cope with the effects of the abuse inflicted on her. No child should have to endure what my child endured. If they do, they should be able to access trusted and proven support service right here in our community.

That is one of the many reasons I am honored to work for the Children's Center of Clackamas County. Every day I work alongside our dedicated team of highly trained professionals and volunteers as they work with children and youth who've endured unspeakable violence, abuse and neglect, and safe families who feel as helpless as I did. We see firsthand the impacts of these traumas on our county's kids and understand that we can't do it alone; we need the whole community to meaningfully address the critical need for intervention and support services that exist in Clackamas County.

That's why I'm a strong supporter of the Clackamas Children's Safety Levy (Measure 3-564), a measure that is designed specifically to serve children and youth impacted by

violence, neglect and abuse. When passed, the levy will create a dedicated source of funding for critical safety services for children and youth, delivered by trusted local organizations to Clackamas County children and families. As a parent and professional working in the field, I believe that locally based community programs, like the Children's Center and many others, are uniquely qualified and appropriately positioned to perform this work and maximize the greatest return on investment.

As we navigate the dueling crises of a pandemic, an economic downturn and now widespread fires, it's important to remember the immense need for support services in our community. We need to act now to protect our most vulnerable kids.

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