

Are you familiar with the Clackamas County Children’s Safety levy out for vote in November and if so, what can you tell me about it?

Yes, and I am thankful for the opportunity to share with you what the Clackamas County Children’s Safety levy is. While the levy does not yet have a Ballot Measure Number associated with it, advocates of the levy are asking citizens to vote “Yes, for Clackamas Kids.”

This November, the citizens of Clackamas County will be given an opportunity to vote on a local children’s safety service levy. This levy has been referred to the voters by the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners. The measure would finance the Clackamas County Children’s Safety Fund dedicated to providing a full array of child abuse and neglect prevention and child safety services for Clackamas County children and youth impacted by violence, abuse or neglect.

What is the financial impact of the levy?

This would be a five-year levy at a cost of .15 cents per \$1,000.00 assessed value. This may cause property taxes to increase more than 3%. For example, a home valued at \$300,000 would pay an increase of approximately \$3.48 a month or \$45.30 per year.

It is estimated the levy would produce approximately \$7.9 million in 2021 – 2022; \$8.2 million in 2022 – 2023; \$8.4 million in 2023 – 2024; \$8.7 million in 2024 – 2025; and \$8.9 million in 2025 – 2026.

How will the money from the levy be used?

Every dollar from this levy will stay in Clackamas County to service and support child abuse survivors and prevent further abuse. Services include:

- Emergency shelter for victims of child abuse, domestic violence, trafficking and sexual assault;
- Case management and advocacy, safety planning and trauma recovery services;
- Mental health counseling, behavioral health therapy, addiction treatment and support groups;
- Parenting support, education and skill building;
- Culturally responsive and population- specific services;
- Strengthening economic support for families; and
- Violence prevention programming to reduce the incidents of violence in the community, and other preventative services.

Who will provide the services?

Even though the application process will be open to all providers for these critical services, preferences will be extended to non-profits that perform services for Clackamas County youths. In addition to the money from this levy staying in Clackamas County, one of the other added benefits will be that Clackamas County-serving non-profits with proven track records will deliver the needed services. It is believed that locally based community programs are uniquely qualified and appropriately positioned to perform this work and maximize the greatest return on the investment.

Why is this levy important?

This levy is important because it is attempting to provide a dedicated source of funding for critical safety services for children and youth. This dedicated funding is critical as we all try to recover from the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic downturn. There has been a 60% increase in domestic violence cases during the onset of the pandemic (data compared to 2019 and 2020 by month during the onset of the pandemic in Oregon as reported by the Clackamas County District Attorney's Office). There are proven programs and services that do protect children from trauma, abuse and neglect that help create a safe and resilient community for our children and youth. But much more can and needs to be done. Having a stable funding source to address these issues are essential if the delivery of those services is to be done.

From a law enforcement perspective, what have you observed in regard to child abuse and the services needed in Clackamas County? How big is the problem of child abuse and neglect?

During my career as a police officer and prior to my position as chief of police for the City of Canby, I spent three years assigned to the Multnomah County Child Abuse Team. The primary purpose of the team was to investigate allegations of child abuse and to focus on how to keep children safe. Throughout my career and as a result of my experience working in the Child Abuse Team, I've developed a better understanding of child abuse and neglect which are serious public health problems. Adverse childhood experiences can have a long-term negative impact on health and wellbeing of the victim and to our society.

Children who are abused and neglected may suffer immediate observable physical injuries such as cuts, bruises, or broken bones, but they may also experience emotional and psychological problems, such as impaired social-emotional skills or anxiety which can have a tremendous impact on lifelong health and wellbeing if left untreated. For example, exposure to violence in childhood increases the risks of injury, future violence victimization and perpetration, substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, delayed brain development, lower educational attainment, and limited employment opportunities. Abuse increases the risk for problems like post-traumatic stress disorder and learning, attention, and memory difficulties.

Adverse childhood experiences include all types of abuse and neglect against a child under the age of 18. There are four common types of abuse and neglect:

- Physical abuse is the intentional use of physical force that can result in physical injury. Examples include hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, or other methods of force against a child;
- Sexual abuse involves pressuring or forcing a child to engage in sexual acts. It includes behaviors such as fondling, penetration, and exposing a child to other sexual activities;
- Emotional abuse refers to behaviors that harm a child's self-worth or emotional well-being. Examples include name calling, shaming, rejection, withholding love, and threatening; and
- Neglect is the failure to meet a child's basic physical and emotional needs. These needs include housing, food, clothing, education, and access to medical care.

The following national statistics show child abuse, neglect and the threat of harm are common. At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the past year, and this is likely an underestimate. In 2018, nearly 1,770 children died of abuse and neglect in the United States. Most types of abuse continue to increase each year.

Children living in poverty experience more abuse and neglect. Rates of child abuse and neglect are 5 times higher for children in families with low socio-economic status compared to children in families with higher socio-economic status.

Child maltreatment is costly. In the United States, the total lifetime economic burden associated with child abuse and neglect was approximately \$428 billion in 2015. This economic burden rivals the cost of other high-profile public health problems, such as stroke and type 2 diabetes.

Most often family members are the persons responsible for committing child abuse, making up 93 percent. Of those family members, mothers and fathers represent 74.8 percent. Leading family stress factors of abused children are substance use, domestic violence, and parental involvement with law enforcement. Many families also have significant financial stress, unemployment issues and mental illness. As a result, it is essential that mental health counseling, behavioral health therapy, addiction treatment, parenting support groups, education skill building, and strengthening economic support are provided to those families that are directly responsible for the care and welfare of their children.

Investigating and responding to allegations of child abuse isn't easy. It is often a very disturbing and unpleasant business when dealing with such cases. However, my career in law enforcement has helped me better understand those children who are trapped in all types of abusive circumstances, need an advocate. An advocate who is willing to intercede on behalf of the child(ern) and stop the abusive conditions that exist. While a child may not be able to communicate it, they are looking for someone to be their advocate and to help stop a life of abuse.

Investments in our children, who will be our adults of the future, is essential if we want to be that advocate for abused children and with the intent and goal to interrupt the cycle and prevent future incidents of child abuse and neglect. As a community, we have an important role to play in our future with regard to providing the services and resources this levy is attempting to provide. Such stable funding is intended to be an investment to assure all children are able reach their full potential.

Proponents of this levy are urging a "yes" vote; giving citizens an opportunity to fight to protect our local children.

For additional information or to learn those who endorse the levy, people can:

Visit YesForClackamasKids.org/supporters.