

Portland Children's Levy Measure 26-240

Official Title: Renew Portland Children's Levy for five years

Question:

Shall Portland continue early childhood, child abuse and mentoring programs; five-year Levy \$0.4026 per \$1,000 assessed value beginning 2024? This measure renews current local option taxes.

Financial Impact:

The levy requests \$0.4026 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. If approved it would continue to cost the owner of a home with an assessed value of \$250,000 about \$100 per year in taxes. It is estimated that the levy will raise an average of \$26.62 million per year for the period of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2029. This is subject to change with fluctuations in the economy and with tax compression due to Oregon Measures 5 and 50.

PROBABLE RESULTS OF YES VOTE

Funds will continue to be available to support city-wide early childhood, after-school, mentoring, child abuse prevention/intervention, foster care, and hunger relief programs. Taxes to fund the levy will remain the same.

PROBABLE RESULTS OF NO VOTE

Some or all of the organizations currently funded by the Portland Children's Levy (PCL) would offer fewer or reduced services, annually impacting academic and social support for over 8,500 children and their families. Some 17,000 children citywide would have greater food insecurity. The Portland Children's Levy as a granting entity would end.

BACKGROUND

The levy was first approved by voters in 2002. It was renewed in 2008 by 72 percent of voters, in 2013 by 74 percent, and in 2018 by 83 percent. It has been referred to the voters for the May 2023 election by the Portland City Council.

The levy was inspired by a June 2000 research study for the Portland Citizens Crime Commission, which concluded that prevention/intervention is an effective and cost-efficient approach to reducing crime and high rates of incarceration. The research specifically called out several risk factors for crime, including childhood abuse, lack of supportive relationships, severe and negative behaviors, and school failure.

The overall PCL goals are:

- Prepare children for school
- Support children's success inside and outside of school
- Eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in children's wellbeing and school success

Funds to achieve the goals are allocated to nonprofit and governmental service providers through a competitive and public Request for Proposals (RFP) process. Six program areas receive funding: Early Childhood, After School, Mentoring, Child Abuse Prevention & Intervention, Foster Care, and Hunger Relief. Investment decisions are made by a five-member Allocation Committee composed of one City of Portland Commissioner, one Multnomah County Commissioner, and three citizen members: two appointed by the Mayor and one by the County Commission Chair. In addition to making investment decisions, the Allocation Committee oversees the annual and ongoing performance of the PCL and its grants.

Annual reports provide data on access to services, i.e., number and demographics of children served; types of service activities; participation/attendance in programs; child/family outcomes; and demographics of the staff and boards of organizations receiving grants. Over 90 grants were awarded for the 2021-22 fiscal year, serving 9,000 participants. Goals on access, participation, and outcomes were largely met, in some instances exceeding targets. Examples of grantees are:

- Native American Youth & Family Center (NAYA) – evidence-based home visiting program to promote infant and child health and support family functioning
- Janus Youth Programs – parent education and supportive services for young parents
- Youth Rights & Justice – school engagement and advocacy for children in foster care
- Hacienda Community Development Corporation – after-school and summer enrichment at residential community centers
- Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization – school-based emergency food pantries, and nutrition and cooking education
- College Possible – after-school mentoring to help low-income students prepare and apply for, attend, and graduate from college

PCL additionally funds the Community Childcare Initiative to assist working families' access to quality, affordable childcare, including support for culturally specific in-home childcare networks.

A Small Grants Fund was created in 2020 to improve access to PCL funding for smaller organizations that faced barriers in applying for grants. Seven organizations were approved for three-year investments.

A Community Council was formed and launched in 2022 to advise PCL staff and the Allocation Committee on levy policies and procedures. The Council is composed of 11-13 members who are approved by the Allocation Committee.

The levy is audited annually by an independent agency. These have found that internal controls over expenses are in place and that administration expenses are consistently less than 5 percent of tax revenues, as required by the levy. Audits show that the administration of grants and grantee monitoring are in compliance with ballot language and grantees' contracts.

SUMMARY OF MEASURE

Renewing this levy would assure the disbursement of approximately \$26.6 million annually to increase opportunity and reduce disparities for Portland's children through community-based programming in six service areas: positive early development; after-school academic and enrichment activities; prevention and treatment of child abuse; support and advocacy for children in foster care; reducing childhood hunger; and supporting youth through adult mentoring.

SUPPORTERS SAY

- This levy is the rare, successful partnership between voters and their government. For two decades PCL has helped community service organizations provide evidence-based services to thousands of Portland children to achieve potential both in and out of school, from birth to 24.
- PCL is needed now more than ever as children rebound emotionally and academically from isolation and stress related to the pandemic.
- The levy has a stellar track record of meeting all standards for effectiveness, budgeting, program capacity, and cultural competence. Annual administrative costs have, without exception, been less than 5 percent of tax revenues. Staff is rigorous in overseeing procedures, and transparency is assured through annual independent audits, public meetings, and the oversight of a citizen committee.
- PCL has designed and implemented new policies in response to questions about cultural competency and transparency. The Small Grants Fund, created in 2020, and Community Council, launched in 2022, are examples of PCL's continued emphasis on equity.

OPPONENTS SAY

There is no organized opposition to this measure.