

## Miller-Travis cont'd from pg 1

tation corridors, health facilities, supermarkets – everything that’s important to a community is happening at the local planning board or zoning board level,” Miller-Travis said.

That’s important, because as Miller-Travis has shown in her research, the most hazardous sites in the country

**“Who lives in proximity to disamenities is not an accident**

are consistently located near communities of color.

Miller-Travis now serves as executive vice president of the Portland-based Metropolitan Group, a social change agency that offers strategy and engagement services to clients.

Prior to a visit to her organization’s Portland headquarters, she sat down with *The Skanner* to discuss the hard fight to bring environmental justice into mainstream awareness, and to give her thoughts on the current presidential administration’s handling of the climate crisis.

**The Skanner News:** How do we see environmental racism in Portland?

**Vernice Miller-Travis:** The geographic distribution of the Black community in Portland – in Oregon generally, but in Portland specifically – to places that have more challenges than other parts of the city. So lack of tree canopy, near traffic corridors, don’t have the basic natural resource amenities – amenities

that most people move to Portland for, that balance between the natural environment and the built environment. It’s so evident in Portland you can reach out and touch it, right? But not everywhere in Portland.

And that is not an accident: who lives where, who has access to what resources, are not an accident. Who lives in proximity to disamenities is not an accident.

There are real tangible ways that you can see discrimination in the practice of the built environment, transportation corridors, the port itself – everything that you need to live in a modern society, most people have no idea what those infrastructure needs are because they don’t live next to them. Except some people live next to a convergence of all the things nobody wants to live next to. And those people tend to be Black and brown and indigenous.

People like to think that in Portland everyone has an ecological perspective, everyone thinks highly of the natural environment and looks and works and wants to protect it, and that’s all true. But there’s still lots of evidence of environmental injustice. And it’s everywhere, and it’s kind of baked into the design and growth patterns of the city.

**TSN:** How did you get started in this work?

**VMT:** I started out as a researcher working for the civil rights division of a small Protestant Church known as United Church of Christ – the remnants of the church established by the pilgrims. It’s a very small Protestant denomina-

## Preschool cont'd from pg 1

pay for, because she expected Preschool Promise to begin in September.

“Besides the program not starting, my frustration is the lack of communication to help parents figure out the situation and to plan accordingly,” she said.

Day said her team has received hundreds of calls and emails in recent weeks from anxious parents seeking an update.

While the burden falls on regional hubs to field parents’ questions and complaints, hub coordinators hardly have a better idea than parents do of when the Early Learning Division will complete the contracting process.

The state has directed preschools new to the program not to begin serving children until their contracts are firmly in place. It also has told programs that are continuing or expanding in the program that they don’t have to serve children without the contractual guarantee of funding.

“We need a way to figure out how to communicate these delays to families,” Day said.

**“My frustration is the lack of communication to help parents figure out the situation and to plan accordingly**

Marion Sutor-Barnes, director of communications and outreach for the Early Learning Division, wrote in an email that the agency has employed an “all hands on deck approach” to processing the contracts. The agency has only hired two of nine planned employees for its new procurement office, she said.

“We recognize this delay is affecting families, and we sincerely apologize.

We are committed to ensuring families have access to the early learning and child care supports they need,” Sutor-Barnes wrote.

Day said her team is still waiting to hear back from returning providers whether they will serve children ahead of getting a contract extension. While larger schools may choose to take of children before receiving funding, home-based providers with less resources may not be able to take the risk, she said.

“Every provider is going to have to make that choice if they want to be matched with families without a guarantee to be paid,” Day said.

Preschools that don’t start until late October will likely have to extend the school day or school year to meet the requirement that children receive the 900 hours of instruction that Preschool Promise guarantees, Sutor-Barnes said.

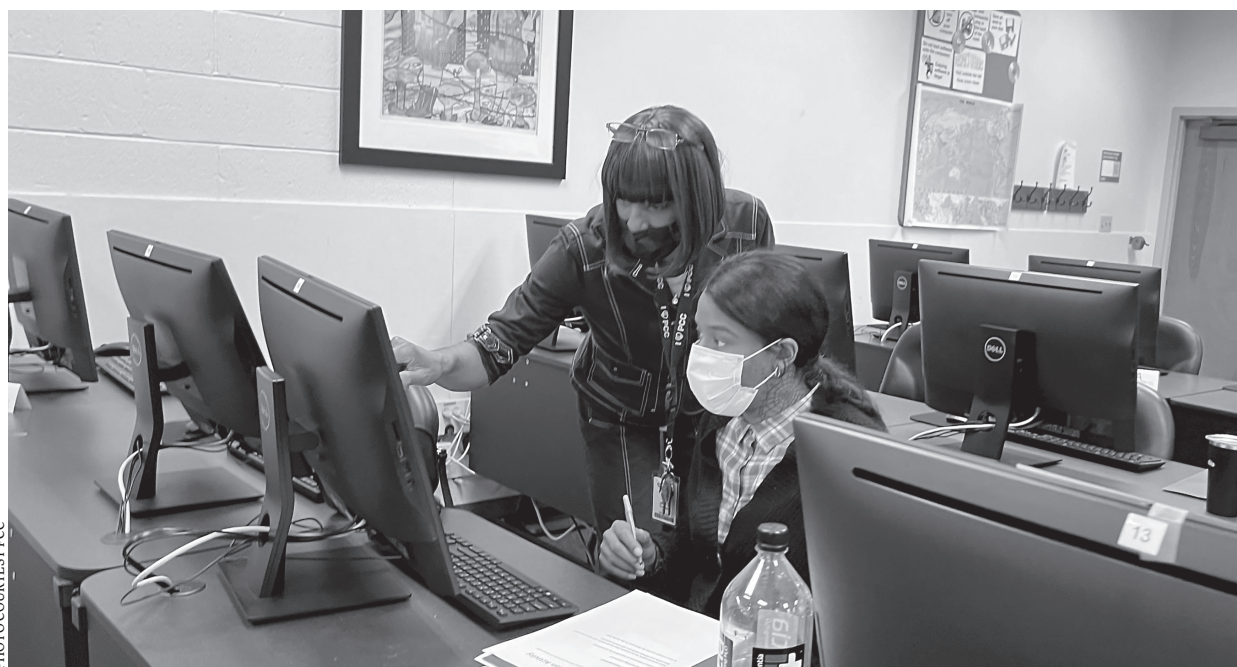


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## Tracee Wells Assists Students, Community Members Connect to Opportunities

With her recent transition into a new role as a training and education specialist, Tracee Wells supports a variety of programs and services at the Portland Metro Workforce Training Center (PMWTC) in Northeast Portland. The facility is part of PCC’s Opportunity Centers, which work to close opportunity gaps to give people the tools they need to develop their skill sets and the confidence to be competitive for high-demand careers. The new PMWTC, which will be the future Metro Opportunity Center, is currently under construction in Cully as part of the 2017 voter-passed bond measure. The facility will include 84 affordable housing units and other supportive services to be accessed by surrounding communities.

## Guns cont'd from pg 1

obtain guns before completing background checks. This has led to thousands of guns being released to people who ultimately failed such checks.

To kick off the campaign, leaders from a range of spiritual communities and gun control activists and organizations gathered with gun violence victims to share both data and trauma.

“In the state of Oregon, when you’re hunting large game like elk, you’re limited to five rounds in a magazine and one in the chamber,” Penny Okamoto, executive director of Ceasefire Oregon, told those gathered at Augustana Lutheran Church last week to announce the measure. “But the Bend shooter had four magazines that held 30 rounds, and there’s no limit. He could have had 50 rounds. There’s no limit. So what we do in Oregon is we have more compassion, we protect a herd of elk from gun violence, more than we do a classroom of kids. And that’s going to stop when we pass Measure 114.”

The event was hosted by Lift Ev-

ery Voice Oregon, which worked with volunteers to gather more than 161,000 signatures to get Measure 114 on the ballot.

Rev. Mark Knutson announced a newly formed coalition to support the Measure 114 campaign,

**“It asks that you become more caring**

with Ceasefire Oregon, the Oregon Alliance for Gun Safety, the Washington Alliance for Gun Safety, the Albina Ministerial Alliance, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, the Oregon Education Association, the Oregon Nurses Association joining the effort.

“We want to do this with respect, the most high-road campaign you can imagine,” Knutson said.

### Testimonies

Speakers testified about how gun violence had made indelible impacts on their lives. Teal, a 24-year-old single mother and activist, described how she no longer feels safe even at work.

“I witnessed a coworker right next to me get shot in the thigh,” Teal said. “The bullet was just a few inches away from my head. The smell of gunpowder stayed with me, and I will never forget the smell or the sight of so much blood. Nor can you ever truly dismiss the feeling that your life almost ended, and that you are in danger in public places where you should feel safe.”

Melay Ramos, 20, described the trauma of seeing her brother shot in the heart and having to shoot the fighter off herself in a Portland hotel room. Her brother later died in her arms as she was trying to get him help.

Linda, a Portland resident, spoke of her anguish as the mother of a woman who was able to purchase a gun and complete suicide, despite a long history of psychiatric hospitalizations.

“Gun violence is destroying our country,” Rabbi Michael Cahana, a chief petitioner on the measure, said. “Too many people have been convinced that there’s nothing

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