



# Richmond Kids First

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## For Immediate Release

### CONTACT

Kimberly Aceves

Kimberly@rysecenter.org | (510) 206-5552

Jordan Simmons

Jordan@eastbaycenter.org | (510) 757-8682

## COALITION SUPPORTS SECURE FUNDING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

RICHMOND – A diverse coalition of youth serving organizations and community leaders, the Invest in Youth Coalition, is sponsoring a ballot initiative to dedicate a portion of the City of Richmond’s annual general fund budget for services to improve the lives of children, youth and young adults in Richmond.

Under the “Richmond Kids First Initiative: The Richmond Fund for Children and Youth,” the city charter would be amended to gradually increase city funding dedicated to children and youth, topping out at 3 percent of the city’s unrestricted general fund budget by 2020, with adjustments in the event of fiscal emergencies.

Youth in Richmond bear the burden of multiple health and social inequities, resulting in disproportionately high rates of homicide, gun violence, high school drop out and punitive discipline policies, unintended or early pregnancy, poverty and unemployment, and contact with the child welfare and juvenile justice system. “Teenagers, like myself, need support in this very difficult part of our lives, that will shape our future and the future of our city,” said 16-year-old Diana Ramirez. “The fund will help provide resources that will help us, the next generation, take charge of our lives and make Richmond thrive once again.”

The new youth fund will increase funding for non-profit community organizations and city programs to provide and expand effective youth services, with no additional taxes or fees, to support mental health and wellness; violence prevention and response; education and job training; support for young people involved in the criminal legal system; media, arts, culture and technology; homelessness prevention; sports and recreation; environmental health and justice programs; and after school and summer programs.

County Supervisor John Gioia stated: “Investing in our youth not only greatly improves their chances of leading successful lives, it’s a wise use of public resources and reduces downstream costs.”

Jordan Simmons, Artistic Director for the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, said the ballot measure will improve opportunities for all local children. “To paraphrase Frederick Douglass,” Simmons said, “it is better to build children than repair men and women.”

Once the measure passes, an independent 15-member community oversight board made up of youth and adults will develop a Strategic Investment Plan to guide funding decisions and make recommendations to the City Council. The ballot measure is modeled after the San Francisco and Oakland Funds for Children and Youth, which have positively contributed to public safety, family support, and overall quality of life while helping to improve coordination of city services, better planning, and attracting outside funding to those cities. Acclaimed local artist Donte Clark said: "Our investment in the community is the only way to break down the barriers that have challenged any real change. This initiative is another collective step forward."

The ballot initiative was recently submitted to the city by representatives of the Invest in Youth Coalition, who plan to gather signatures to place the measure on the November 2016 ballot.

"This ballot measure is about our collective commitment to building a youth, children and family friendly city," said Kimberly Aceves, Executive Director of the RYSE Center.

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