

CLEAN, from page 4

Bassos said. The number of people with prior convictions is likely lower in Oregon because the state made possession of less than an ounce of marijuana a civil offense in the 1970s. The agency did not have data on the number of people on parole or probation, or the number of people living in the community with marijuana offenses on their records.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, African-Americans statewide are more than twice as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession – and the discrepancy is more glaring in Multnomah County, where blacks are more than three times as likely as whites to be arrested for marijuana possession. That's despite the fact that African Americans make up just 2 percent of Oregon's population, and nationwide surveys on illicit drug use show that whites are more likely to use the drug, and illicit drugs in general.

"When Measure 91 was moving through the electoral process, we were really aggrieved that no one mentioned the obvious, that no one mentioned that there are hundreds if not thousands of folks of color who are serving time for relatively minor offenses for marijuana," said Midge Purcell, director of advocacy and public policy for the Urban League of Portland. "Now we have a situation where this is being looked upon as a prime opportunity for entrepreneurship. That conversation rarely includes communities of color, and there are many, many people languishing in prison for the

same or similar activities."

Among jurisdictions that have legalized pot, Oregon is unusual in that it's even considering addressing the criminal justice aspect of legalization, according to Michael Tennison, a research associate at the Criminal Justice Policy Foundation.

"I think there's a lot of political courage there to not just recognize but own up to the failure of the war on drugs, and address the people caught up in the war on drugs," Tennison said.

According to Tennison, Maryland is considering a bill that would allow for the expungement of records relating to convictions for those possessing less than 10 grams of marijuana, and last year possession of 10 grams or less a civil

offense punishable by a fine of no more than \$100, similar to what Oregon did in 1973.

Missouri is considering a bill that would allow some marijuana convictions to be expunged for certain people, effective immediately should the state ever legalize the drug. New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island are considering similar bills. Under California's Proposition 47, people with marijuana felonies can have

them reduced to misdemeanors on their records.

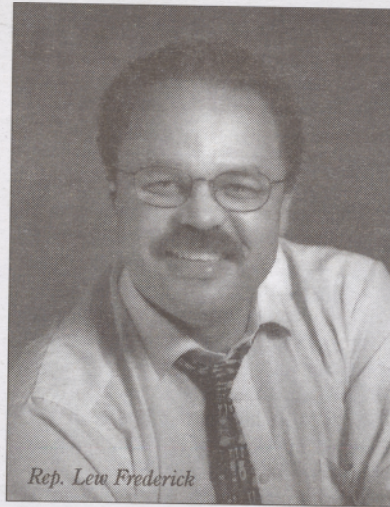
"No other state has gone this far," Tennison said in reference to the proposed Oregon legislation.

Tennison also noted the United States is unique in that it even needs to consider bills like HB 3372 and SB 364: 90 percent of countries around the world already provide for the retroactive adjustment of criminal records and freeing prisoners when a law

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Rep. Lew Frederick

changes. "Lawmakers have to appear tough on crime, and letting people out of prison doesn't have the same economic benefits as regulating the whole industry."

Rep. Frederick said HB 3372 was spurred in part by broader concern about the status of people with felony convictions. In Oregon, convicted felons can vote, but still face legal discrimination when it comes to employment, housing and government benefits.

Frederick is a vocal supporter of the Ban the Box movement – a nationwide campaign to remove questions about felony convictions from job applications but allow background checks to occur once a conditional job offer has been made. Last week the Portland City Council, which is considering a Ban the Box ordinance, held a three-hour hearing and received thousands of petitions from people in support of removing questions about felony convictions.

Advocates argue that among released prisoners who secure at least a year of employment, the rate of recidivism is just 16 percent. The general rate of recidivism is more than 52 percent.

"Something needs to be done to close the revolving door of recidivism," Purcell told Street Roots. "Having a job and also having

housing are the two best ways of avoiding recidivism. We have a responsibility, and also it just makes sense to ensure people are employable."

James Posey, a business owner and formal mayoral candidate, testified at the hearing on behalf of the Coalition of Black Men and advocated that the city needs to encourage businesses to hiring those they consider high-risk.

In an interview with Street Roots, Posey spoke in support of both the Ban the Box campaign and House Bill 3372 as part of an effort to roll back the war on drugs, but noted that more needs to be done to repair the damage.

Posey noted the recent push toward legalization of marijuana is largely because the drug has become socially acceptable in white communities. In "The New Jim Crow," author Michelle Alexander notes a general historical trend where drugs associated with communities of color, particularly African American, media, government officials and the medical community tend to portray it as dangerous and link it to other criminal behavior. But once it becomes popular among whites – as marijuana did in the 1970s – it's perceived as more innocuous. That same discrepancy persists in the difference in perception and punishment for powdered cocaine use versus crack cocaine, he said: "You decide you want to do crack cocaine and you've got a felony on your record, you're dead meat. You're road kill."

"There's a huge need to figure out ways to reclaim lost lives," Posey told Street Roots. "Short of an organized effort to do it, it's not going to happen."

Mulgrew said he thinks the difficulty in shedding convictions creates a cycle for a lot of people caught up in the justice system. "They put these labels and these convictions on you, and that's why a lot of criminals remain criminals. Just going through the whole thing showed me it's not justice for all. It's justice for some, and mostly for those who can afford it."

**FIRST PUBLIC HEARING
regarding the
PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU SETTLEMENT
AGREEMENT**

Thursday, April 2, 2015, 5:30-8:30pm
Charles Jordan Community Center (in the small gym)
9009 N. Foss Avenue, Portland, OR

In accordance with the City of Portland Settlement Agreement with the US Department of Justice, the Community Oversight Advisory Board will hold its first public hearing to gather input in the form of **public and written comments on the Portland Police Bureau's community engagement and outreach efforts**. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend.

Questions: paul.demuniz@gmail.com
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