

Enough with juvenile Measure 11 charges

We know too much, and have seen enough evidence of the consequences, to continue punishing juvenile offenders as adults. We know too well the research explaining the development stages of a young brain to say that the actions of a 16-year-old are derived from the same comprehension as those of a grown man or woman.

EDITORIAL

And we've had generations to understand that the biggest impact of confinement and felony records isn't as a deterrent or eye-for-an-eye punishment, but a lifetime trying to overcome the traumatic and sometimes criminal lessons of imprisonment.

This is not to excuse the actions, sometimes horrific, of young adults. A crime is a crime. But youths of color are disproportionately in the crosshairs of heavy-handed Measure 11 charges that carry the very real threat of serious prison time. It is often an intimidation tactic, with plea deals nearly guaranteed.

When four boys from Grant High School shoved and threatened another student, they deserved to be punished. They deserved to learn their lesson. They were 15 and 16 years old at the time. They had time to learn and make retribution.

Measure 11, passed by Oregon voters in the mid-90s, requires that juveniles age 15 and older be automatically tried in adult court and face a mandatory minimum sentence if the prosecutor charges them with one of 21 Measure 11 crimes. These crimes range from assault and

robbery to rape and murder.

Measure 11 charges of first- and second-degree robbery meant the Grant High boys were treated as adults, and faced mandatory minimum sentences of more than five years in prison. As predicted, the intimidation worked and their charges were reduced to lesser offenses. (Even if you had the money and time to go to court, would you risk five years in prison with no early release?) But the youths are still channeled through the adult system, rather than the juvenile system with services designed for youths. And their mug shots and names were in the media, distributed online and forever affixed on the Internet to serious felonies, regardless of the ultimate conviction.

Since 1995, Oregon district attorneys have processed more than 4,000 juveniles younger than 18 through adult court under Measure 11. Multnomah County has the highest rates, charging 1,200 youths with Measure 11 between 1995 and 2012. Of those, 66 percent were kids of color, according to Oregon Justice Resource Center data for both local and statewide figures. In 2015 alone, among resolved juvenile Measure 11 cases in Multnomah County, three out of four involved youths of color.

One could argue that charging youths as adults might hold some merit if the practice was shown to reduce crime rates.

It's not.

So let's take our heads out of the tough-on-crime sandbox and really look at what we're doing to juveniles under Measure 11. It is ineffective and damaging. It is costly and unnecessary. It is time to let it go.

Making progress in making housing a reality

People ask me if the homeless and housing emergency in Multnomah County is working. The short answer is, yes. The long answer is, we've got a long way to go.

The most visible aspect of the homeless emergency is having the mayor's office more or less legalize tent camping. A lot of people have doubted the mayor's efforts. It's my opinion, like it or not, that the policy is creating an atmosphere that regardless of how you feel about it, people understand the issue at a much deeper level.

Weather you support homeless campers in your neighborhood or hate having homeless people in your neighborhood – the answer

is still housing. It's the humane thing to do. The reality is for people of color and poor people there has been a housing crisis occurring in our community for decades. Saying that, the homeless emergency is creating an atmosphere in both government and in the private sector to act swiftly on important housing policies.

Rental increases and evictions coupled with a shortage of thousands of affordable housing units are creating a nightmare scenario in our community. Amid the backdrop of a thriving city, people are struggling. That struggle is real.

Both Mayor Charlie Hales and City Council, along with the County Commission led by Deborah Kafoury have prioritized housing and homelessness. They've worked hard to create new shelters, enact new tenant laws to protect renters, and have supported legislation in Salem to support more affordable housing in our community.

They are also promising to give additional support in next year's budget cycle. These are all great steps, but it's not enough. Not even close.

Think about this: Our region is short an estimated 40,000 affordable housing units and growing. Some people say that the private housing market will short

itself out if we're just able to build more housing units. Wrong.

One – Landlords continue to raise rents.

Two – Of the nearly 22,000 new housing units have been built in the Portland region in the past five years only an estimated 3,000 of those units are affordable to low-income Portlanders. An estimated 85 percent of those units are luxury units. It's a train wreck.

County Chair Deborah Kafoury recently said in her State of the County address, "The real question we face as a community is the same one we struggle with at the county: What are our priorities?"

Kafoury goes on to say, "The greatest challenge we face, in my view, is how to address the housing crisis in Multnomah County. Over the last year, rents countywide have jumped by double digits and the number of vacant apartments is hovering at 3 percent.

The cheapest two-bedroom apartment is more than the take-home pay of a minimum wage worker and more than the benefits of a single parent with two children on temporary cash assistance. That's why people increasingly need rent assistance and help finding a home. But providing these services is getting harder.

We must find ways to include affordable units in the multi-million-dollar developments that are rapidly changing our neighborhoods. We need to work with private developers to increase the supply of affordable housing for renters and buyers. We also must keep rent affordable, otherwise sky-high rent increases and no-cause evictions will push more people to need help."

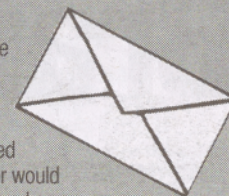
True that.

We are looking to our city and county leaders to continue to be bold and to dream big.

Housing advocates and the larger community are looking forward to helping make the dream of giving people a safe place to call home a reality. A dream of that isn't just for the privileged and elite, but instead one that gives poor and working people a fighting chance to have a better life.

Write in

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