

# Hales pitches program to divert homeless from courts

BY EMILY GREEN  
STAFF WRITER

In an effort to stop the revolving door of homeless repeat offenders through Multnomah County's criminal court system, local government agencies are working to establish a resource center where they can send homeless people who commit low-level criminal offenses, rather than sending them to jail.

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales announced plans for the new program, along with his proposed budget, at a Monday morning press conference at City Hall.

The Mayor's Office is partnering with Multnomah County, the district attorney's office, Portland police and A Home for Everyone to develop the program to address the growing livability and low-level criminal issues resulting from homelessness, states an outline of the program's goals provided to Street Roots by the Mayor's Office.

The program, Homeless Engagement Alternatives Resources and Treatment, or HEART, will be aimed at reducing costs associated with arresting and prosecuting people experiencing homelessness by engaging with the homeless community, connecting individuals with resources, and diverting low-level homeless offenders away from court by enrolling them in services and intensive counseling instead.

Hales' proposed budget dedicates \$2.3 million toward the program.

This is out of a total of \$31.8 million he has earmarked for affordable housing, low-income homeownership and rental programming, and homeless services, according to the Mayor's Office. Of that, \$16.2 million will go to homeless services including outreach, campsite cleanup, permanent housing placements, veteran services and shelters.

HEART will be modeled, in part, after King County's Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, where low-level drug and prostitution offenders are diverted into

community-based treatment and support services such as housing, health care, job training, treatment and mental health support, instead of being booked into jail and prosecuted.

The Seattle program, however, is almost entirely grant funded, said Josh Alpert, Hales' chief of staff.

Presently, many low-level homeless offenders are processed through Multnomah County's Community Court, and as Street Roots reported in March, more than half fail to successfully complete treatment or community service, which can result in a criminal conviction or, in some cases, jail time.

"The consequences for participants in (HEART's diversion program) who are unable to remain engaged in services is among the things to be discussed, but the intent of the effort is to do everything we can to keep people out of the court system by offering them access to services that work for them," said Marc Jolin, initiative director at A Home For Everyone, in an email to Street Roots.

While the program's planning is in its infancy, officials intend to incorporate harm reduction philosophies and a recognition of the homeless community's needs, while maintaining accountability, according to the city's program outline.

The HEART resource center will be a place where people experiencing homelessness can meet with a caseworker who will assess their needs, connect them with services, and educate them about the city's Safe Sleep Policy and shelter options in the community.

"The exact cost of the program will depend on the final concept we land on, but the intention is to build additional service system capacity to support the project, rather than reprogramming services that are already oversubscribed," said Jolin.

The program is expected to be up and running this summer.

## Mother's Day

by James Marsh Jr.

Mother's Day is not too far away,  
this year it's on the 8th of May  
Mother's Day.  
That's a day we should  
all remember. If it wasn't for our mothers  
where would we be?  
There would be no sons  
or daughters, and  
no society

Mother's Day is a special day, showing  
our mothers  
how much we care  
how much we love them  
for always being there

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they always want the best for you  
they want the best for you in every way, so  
give your mother a  
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