

# MEASURE OF A MAN



PHOTO BY EMILY GREEN

A participant in the Black Male Achievement initiative's Summer Youth Experience helps Multnomah County Commissioner Loretta Smith onto the stage. Smith kicked off Saturday's event, aimed at educating policy makers and the community about reforms the youth would like to see made to Oregon's mandatory minimum sentencing law.

## Black youths take aim at Oregon's mandatory-minimum law, Measure 11

BY EMILY GREEN  
STAFF WRITER

The message resonating from the outdoor stage on Aug. 20 was clear: It's time for Oregon to stop automatically trying juveniles as adults, condemning them to long prison sentences with no chance at early release.

"The two main problems with charging juveniles as adults," 21-year-old Ryan Seed stated into the microphone, "are the increase in recidivism rates and the cost."

Seed is one of the 20 high school and college students who invited community members and policymakers to Northeast Portland's Woodland Park that afternoon for an unveiling of reforms they would like to see made to Oregon's mandatory-minimum-sentencing law, Measure 11.

The students are all young, black men who were given their choice of public policies to delve into as part of their participation in Portland's Black Male Achievement (BMA) Summer Youth Experience, an opportunity offered to black males participating in Multnomah County and Worksystem's summer job placement program for young people.

Seed, an intern with BMA, explained that

his peers picked mandatory-minimum-sentencing policy as their focus for the past six weeks because it was a topic that hit close to home.

"We've had a couple youth who were affected by Measure 11, or had people in their circles who were affected by Measure 11," he said.

In Oregon, juveniles age 15 and older are automatically tried as adults when they are charged with one of 21 person-to-person violent crimes that fall under Measure 11.

These crimes range from second-degree assault and robbery to manslaughter and murder. If convicted, a juvenile with no record would face the same lengthy mandatory minimum sentence that an older, career criminal would face for the same crime. The sentences range in length from 70 months to 25 years.

Stephon Hartley was one of the young men who's been personally affected by the law. He's worked as an intern in the Portland's Office of the Mayor for the past two years.

Hartley remembers that when he was a small child, an uncle he was "super close with" suddenly disappeared. He found out later it was because he had been convicted of a Measure 11 assault crime.

"I was 13 when he came back into my life, and he was a completely different person. He was institutionalized. It was kind of hard to connect with him for a couple of years," Hartley said. "You have this memory of a person — happy, smiling — and then they are thrown away for something, for a long amount of time, and then they come back completely different."

He said this personal experience is why he believes inmates should have the opportunity to shorten their sentences with good behavior.

"That's just one of the policy recommendations we have that's near and dear to me," he said.

Portland was one of 11 cities selected in 2013 by the League of American Cities to take part in the BMA initiative, a program aimed at improving outcomes for black men and boys by developing strategies aimed at education, violence prevention and family strengthening, while also involving youth in local government and civic engagement. It's

**"It's very evident that while Measure 11, as a remedy during the decade of the war on crime, seemed to make sense, seemed to bring comfort, it ruined lives and marginalized families and communities."**

KEVIN MODICA,  
PORTLAND POLICE CAPTAIN

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