

**FINDING HOME, from page 10**

was taken to Legacy Emanuel for six weeks. She gained 30 pounds while being treated for osteomyelitis, an infection of the bone. From there she moved to a nursing home and then into temporary lodging with a friend, a heroin addict who let her stay in exchange for paying the electricity bill. On Feb 1, 2016, the friend's son threw them all out.

"I had nowhere to go." She ended up at Safety Off the Streets, a 70-bed women's shelter in Northwest Portland.

"The first three nights I slept on a mat on the floor. They throw you out at 7:30 a.m.," she said. "I couldn't walk fast enough to beat the cold."

After a few days in the shelter she scored a bunk bed. "Less traffic, more space. We ran our corner."

She said she never exchanged her purse for a backpack. "That would mean I was homeless."

She got a copy of the Rose City Resource booklet from Street Roots. "I called everyone, every day. I went to appointments that I had no business going to. I'm OCD. My belt has to match my shoes has to match my underwear. Mornings are difficult. But I can fill out endless forms."

But property management companies wanted nothing to do with her or her bad credit or her criminal record, she said.

At Northwest Pilot Project, or NWPP, where low-income seniors are helped with housing and transportation needs, she saw a housing specialist who offered assistance. However, it looked to be a long process and Chrysanne was impatient.

She heard about a friend of a friend of a friend who would be moving out of a room in a house. Crucially, there was no property management company. The rent was \$450 per month, utilities included. She called the homeowner and told him she was clean and could carry her own weight.

She went back to NWPP. "I told Marilee, the housing specialist, about the room, about losing Bob, losing my stuff, losing my physical capabilities. Marilee asked how soon we could put together a rental agreement. I got the agreement to her the next day."

There was no furniture other than the bed but NWPP gave her bedding, a quilt and a crocheted blanket, and put her in touch with the Community Warehouse to get furniture. NWPP helped her get started with the rent.

For a moment, she can't speak. She remembers when she first moved in.

"I cried the first three days from relief, and cried again the next three days from loneliness."

After our third meeting at Starbucks, I drive Chrysanne home. She shows me the garden she is tending - her plants on the coffee table in the living room. In her bedroom she has a pretty trunk. She carried it with her when she first left Boston. Her albums are in it now - Cream, Janis Joplin, Led Zeppelin.

She has Bob's Star Wars figures and his dragon music box, her share of his ashes stored inside it.

All her journals are in her room too. She is working on a book, titled "Both Sides of the Wall," about her time in prison and as a correctional officer.

She pats a red Dustbuster that Marilee at Northwest Pilot Project provided. It helps her keep her belongings free of Buddy's fur. He's the house golden retriever.

"He sheds like a mother," she says, rubbing his ears, "but I adore him."

# Oregonians favor softer penalties for drug users

*Poll finds widespread support among voters for defelonizing simple drug possession*

BY EMILY GREEN  
STAFF WRITER

As lawmakers in Salem consider a bill to make possession of illicit drugs a misdemeanor rather than a felony, a statewide poll of Oregon voters reveals widespread support across party lines.

Now, drug users caught with even trace amounts of illegal drugs, such as the residue left on drug paraphernalia after use, can be convicted of felony drug possession punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

A poll of 600 registered voters across Oregon, funded by ACLU of Oregon, found 73 percent favor defelonizing simple drug possession.

Political opinion research group GBA Strategies polled a cross-section of Oregon voters in late January. With a 4-point margin of error, 58 percent of

Republicans, 91 percent of Democrats and 70 percent of Independents indicated they favor making "small-scale possession of drugs a misdemeanor, with access to treatment, instead of a felony, which carries steeper penalties."

Additionally, 78 percent of respondents indicated they would be more likely to vote for a district attorney or sheriff who thinks drug problems should be addressed more frequently through prevention and treatment rather than arrests and punishment.

ACLU of Oregon Director David Rogers said this shows "it's clear that change begins at the local level, and we need to not just change state law, but change the way our local criminal justice system is run."

In 2014, California became the first state to defelonize drug possession.

Roughly 1,500 Oregonians each year are convicted of drug possession as their first felony conviction, with 500 of those new felons having no prior criminal record, said Mike Schmidt, director of Oregon's Criminal Justice Commission. The CJC is the state agency responsible for collecting and compiling statewide crime data.

"Those 500 people have collateral consequences of having that felony," he told Street Roots in December. Those consequences include barriers to housing, employment and education, he said, and "we still see a profound disparity in who is being convicted."

A CJC study found that in 2015, African-Americans in Oregon were convicted of felony drug possession at more than double the rate of whites.

When legislators passed Oregon's racial-profiling bill, HB 2002, in 2015, they created a task force to determine ways to prevent profiling in the criminal justice system. The result is HB 2355, which in addition to defelonizing simple drug possession would also require training on implicit bias for all law enforcement officers throughout their careers and the collection of traffic-stops data that include the perceived race and ethnicity of the person who is stopped.

The proposal to defelonize drugs has widespread support among law enforcement and top government officials, with the Oregon State Sheriffs' Association, Oregon Association of Chiefs

of Police, Association of Community Corrections Directors, Gov. Kate Brown and Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum all vocalizing their endorsement of a new approach to drug possession that places treatment before punishment.

The ACLU of Oregon poll shows the majority of Oregonians across the rural-urban divide agree. It also revealed 64 percent of respondents indicated they personally know someone who has struggled with drug addiction.

"The poll results show that the public recognizes that the war on drugs is a failure, and we need to do something different after three decades," Rogers said.

People caught with "substantial quantities" of illicit drugs would still be charged with felony possession.

Those caught with smaller, user-sized amounts of Schedule I and Schedule II drugs, such as heroin, methamphetamine and cocaine, would be charged with a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by up to one year in jail and a \$6,250 fine, should the bill become law.

Possession of those drugs is currently a Class B or Class C felony, depending on the drug, punishable by up to either 10 or 20 years in prison, and up to \$250,000 or \$375,000 in fines.

While the current draft outlines specific quantities that would qualify for the lesser charge of misdemeanor, those amounts will likely be negotiated down before the bill is passed.

Justice reinvestment efforts intended to slow Oregon's prison population growth have already helped many counties reduce the rate of imprisonment among those convicted of nonviolent drug and property offenses in recent years.

Support among Oregon district attorneys is varied, with some vocally opposed, such as in Clackamas, Linn and Clatsop counties, and others in favor, such as in Deschutes County.

While the Oregon District Attorneys Association supports the law enforcement training and stops data tracking portion of HB 2355, its spokesperson Kevin Neely said it's waiting for the next draft of the bill to

officially weigh in. The association is waiting to see what the new quantities will be, and there is also some concern that a defendant could rack up "150 (possession charges) and never get a felony conviction," said Neely.

Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill hasn't weighed in yet either, but he's quick to point out that he's been a proponent of recent efforts to put treatment before punishment on the local level.

"I have been a tremendous supporter of the Multnomah County LEAD program, which began seeing its first clients last week and is premised on no criminal charge at all for (possession of controlled substance) related charges and supports a harm reduction model as it relates to services, programs and treatment," Underhill told Street Roots in an email.

He said he's also pushing for a Treatment First Program that he hopes will become operational early next month. This program would assign varying levels of drug treatment depending on a defendant's risk level and need. All qualifying felony possession offenses would be reduced to misdemeanors, and successful completion of the program would result in a dismissal or reduction of the offense.

It's expected the "vast majority" of felony drug possession cases would qualify for the Treatment First Program, according to a draft outline of the program provided by the District Attorney's Office.

## DEFELONIZING DRUG POSSESSION

*Would you favor or oppose a proposal to change Oregon law to make small-scale possession of drugs a misdemeanor, with access to treatment, instead of a felony, which carries steeper penalties?*

