

Drug Free Zones Face Challenges

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Decision, police officers rather than judges now order excluded persons to leave drug and prostitution zones.

If the excluded enter the zone, they can be arrested for "failure to obey a lawful order of a police officer."

Excluded people can get "variances" that allow them to move through the zones for employment, health services or their own homes. They may not stop along the way or visit any other destination.

Variances used to be issued at police precincts; now they will be given, upon request, by the same officer who made the original exclusion. This, deputy district attorney Jim Hayden says, answers the complaint that going to the precinct to get the variance was a hardship.

"Anyone who still has a problem with this just doesn't like the drug free zone," Hayden says.

The zones have been attacked as a violation of civil liberties. Dave Fidanque of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon says he has not yet seen the latest proposal. He considers the removal of some zones a step in the right direction, but says that allowing police officers, rather than

judges, to issue citations "makes them prosecutor, judge and jury," in violation of the constitution's separation of powers.

Garrett Richardson of Multnomah Public Defenders is happy that variances will be easier to get, but says they don't cover the needs of homeless and indigent people to "hang out" in the neighborhoods they live in. He notes that people excluded have merely been accused of a crime by a police officer, not convicted of one.

Most neighborhood associations have endorsed the proposed drug free zones. An exception is the Sabin Community Association.

Sabin Chair Fred Smith says the zones "just move the problem around," and seems to have had little effect in eliminating drug houses. In fact, he said when one resident complained about a suspected drug house, he was arrested.

By allowing the police to pick on people they deem criminals, the law may contribute to gentrification, Smith says.

"Don't get me wrong, we don't want drug dealers in the neighborhood, but why give up another part of your civil rights for something that doesn't help anyway?" Smith says.

Conversely Rocky Polzin of the King Neighborhood Association claims the zones work.

"We haven't had anyone come to the neighborhood association and say, 'This is so unfair, people are picking on me.' If it works, don't change it. Our neighborhood was broke real bad by drugs and prostitution and this was one of the tools used to combat it."

Woodlawn Neighborhood Association President Theresa Lareau is unhappy with the redrawn boundaries excluding her neighborhood.

Hayden says his office may extend the line northward as far as Northeast Dekum Street, but this would still leave out Woodlawn Park, former home of the Woodlawn Park Blooms.

"We're not happy about this at all," Lareau says. "We had it, and it worked. The problem isn't solved, it's been abated. The neighborhood's on an upswing, property values are going up, people are using the park again, and all that could change if the zone went away."

Eliot Neighborhood Association member Neil Swart feels being next to a drug free zone makes his community a place for dealers to migrate to, and therefore is happy the zone will be extended to Dawson Park. He says he cannot



A revised drug free zone in northeast Portland may extend a boundary as far as Dekum Street, but leave out Woodlawn Park to the objection of the Woodlawn Neighborhood Association.

PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

judge the constitutional issues involved.

"I'm in favor of tools that allow the police to enforce the law; I hope they're used judiciously," he says. "I know the police have done an extraordinary job of policing Dawson Park. It's an exemplary example of community policing."

Anti-crime activist Richard Brown, chair of the Hope and Hard Work Committee, has been a consistent supporter of the zones.

"It has worked and I'm getting tired of all the legal challenges," he says. "People living in a neighborhood have as much right to be free of crime as dope dealers have

to travel to their own homes - which they can do under this law." Of Woodlawn's complaint he says, "I understand why they're unhappy to lose it - because it has worked. But the nice thing about this law is that it isn't carved in stone. If there are more problems, it can be put back."

Data Finds Many Struggle for Food

At least one in seven Oregon adults live in households that struggle to put food on the table, according to new state health survey data released by the Oregon Center for Public Policy.

"During the first year of the recession, at least 371,000 adults in Oregon lived in households that were 'food insecure,' meaning they were not always sure where their next meal would come from," said Michael Leachman, policy analyst at OCPP.

Leachman said that the actual number could be a third higher, because the survey was conducted by telephone.

"People who are so financially strapped that they are at risk of going hungry are likely to lack a working telephone. Prior to the recession, Census Bureau figures show that Oregon had one of the highest rates of hunger in the nation," said Leachman. "Then we got hit by the recession harder than nearly every other state, exacerbating the problem."

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