

DRUG FREE ZONE DEBATED safeguards Wanted

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"I want to know how you allow a police officer to be prosecutor, judge and executioner," one African-American woman said.

"I'm concerned that my young brothers and sisters, people of color, are targeted," said Cassandra Villanueva, 23. "We're told that we young people are the future, but too often we're excluded from decision-making. You can say that arrests are not based on skin color, but when the majority of exclusions go to people of color, it's a cause of concern."

Others also expressed concern about the high percentage of minorities among those excluded.

Andrea Meyer of the American Civil Liberties Union said Potter's proposals go a long way toward meeting her organization's concerns about the zones taking away due process.

"One's right to travel and associate freely is a fundamental right

way all have," Meyer said.

Although safeguards and a system for challenging exclusions were added to the ordinance after they were instituted in 1992, Meyer said many people do not understand their rights or have a way to defend them.

Skip Osbourne said, "This is the United States of America. We're entitled to be considered innocent until proven guilty. We have a right to travel freely. We're becoming a police state."

King Neighborhood Association chair Chad Debnun said the ordinance as is gives too much power to the police. However, he added, "We're moving in the direction I'd like to see this go."

The Boise Neighborhood Association initially voted to support continuation of the zone after hearing from district attorney Jim Hayden. However, at a subsequent meeting, after hearing from critics, they asked for amendments.

Others are asking authorities to get to the root of drug and prostitu-



PHOTO BY ISAIAH BOUIE/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Drug and prostitution free zones were added to Portland's law enforcement arsenal in an attempt to get a handle on street crime in problem areas.

tion problems by concentrating on prevention.

The Eliot Neighborhood Association has called for a drug free zone to be continued in their neighborhood, where the district attorney's office has called for its removal. Some Eliot board mem-

bers who attended the forum said later they were not aware of the concerns associated with the zone at the time of the vote.

Richard Brown, chair of the Hope and Hard Work Committee and a local African-American leader, supports the zones.

"The police are losing a powerful tool to deal with street level drug dealing," he said.

Woboril said currently, exclusions can be appealed to a hearings examiner and that 25 percent of such appeals result in the exclusion being voided. An attorney added that he had challenged "dozens" of such exclusions, "and I've never lost a case."

Several people asked if the law meant excluded people could not visit their own families.

Woboril said that as a practical matter police aren't interested in people passing through an area.

"The behavior police target is people standing around, circling the block, behavior central to drug dealing," he said.

Chief Derrick Foxworth told the forum, "Over the years this has been a very effective tool for us, but we understand the concerns."

The next forum will be Thursday, Dec. 1, starting at 6:30 p.m. in council chambers at City Hall.

Fairness of Law Questioned

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Commissioner Erik Sten, a past critic of the zones, said, "Repeat offenders are doing these things over and over again and it's not possible to keep them all in jail - that's the problem. The issue for me is can we exclude people who have no record on their first offense? I will continue to not sup-

port this until that's fixed."

During a recent hearing on the issue, Commissioner Sam Adams seemed to be lining up as a supporter of the zones.

"While looking at ethnicity, boundaries and fairness, I hope we don't dull what has been a very useful tool," he said. "Some neighborhoods are overwhelmed by this kind of activity."



Travis Gamble, Multnomah County parole officer with the African American Program.

Life After Time

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itself to building relationships and trying to overcome barriers that keep people from succeeding," said Travis Gamble, another parole officer for the program.

Statistics show two-thirds of those who leave prison are likely to show up there again within their first year out. This is why it's essential that training and mentoring goes beyond simply having a parole officer to meet with clients for just a

short time every month. With 80 percent of those behind bars being non-violent offenders, a lot of them simply need treatment programs.

"They fall back into the same places," Blank said.

After release, a parole officer can seem intimidating to the inmate, blocking off effective communication and simply acting as an authority figure.

But the African American Program is about feeling comfortable to speak with others if you're experiencing a relapse so that you can climb out of

any holes you might be falling into.

"We develop some trust so that if there are issues, we can address them and connect people with services," Gamble said.

Former offenders often have broken ties with their family and friends and finding a way back into their hearts takes a lot of time and a lot of trust.

The program covers topics like how to be more involved in family oriented activities, how to be a good parent and how to be a role model for younger family members who might

be falling into criminal activity.

The documentary started in the late 1990s and spans the life struggles of reentry, so it won't be finished until early 2006.

The filmmakers are also fundraising to launch "From Prison to Home" as a sort of "media spokesperson" for the African American Program. They're also hoping to make the film's website, www.fromprisonhome.com, a comprehensive resource for those going through reentry.

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Nancy Stueber, OMSI President and CEO

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