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# OPINION

## Fighting for Justice to Protect our Community

### We need better and safer gun regulations

BY LEW CHURCH

The recent op-ed in The Portland Observer ("We Must Do Better for Our Children," Aug. 14 issue) by Marian Wright Edelman was an excellent invitation for communities to organize for action and fight for justice.

As with the 1968 anti-poverty campaign by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the fight for justice can and should include better, safer gun regulations to protect our kids and our communities.

On Oct. 1, a coalition of organizers and groups are holding the Oregon Conference on Youth, Guns and Violence at First Unitarian Church in downtown Portland. We are inviting national, as well as local, speakers for daytime workshops and an evening community forum. We're also looking at a gun turn-in event with the Portland Office of Neigh-

borhood Involvement and the Portland Police Bureau.

As a community organizer who was a VISTA Volunteer in Macon, Ga., working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and many years after Dr. King's assassination in Memphis, Tenn., I'm especially concerned that the tragedy and travesty of recent gun violence are addressed and fixed.

There seems to be a great deal of frustration and even skepticism that effective gun legislation can become a reality in Oregon or nationally. However, as shown in the recent and excellent docudrama now showing in Portland, Fruitvale Station, about the killing of transit rider Oscar Grant on BART in Oakland, Calif., the need is not just for better regulations in our communities, but for an intensification of the fight against racial profiling and in a larger context against poverty itself.

From the travesty of the "not guilty" verdict in the Trayvon Martin case against George

Zimmerman to the death of Portland's own Keaton Otis at the hands of Portland police, there needs to be far greater vigilance over the use and misuse of force.

From Aurora to the Clackamas Mall shooting last year, from Ft. Hood to Virginia Tech, mass shootings also need to be stopped sooner, not later. No matter what the National Rifle Association or the American Legislative Exchange Council will argue.

Historically, gun violence tends to produce an outcry for reform that doesn't bear fruit, per se. However, by inviting survivors and family members of gun violence, from the Clackamas Mall shooting to Oregon's Thurston High School, to some of the Newtown parents from Sandy Hook Elementary School, our Oregon Conference on Youth, Guns and Violence seeks to create a community dialogue for practical solutions sooner, not later.

Two of the Newtown parents, for example, were in Oregon last week in connection with a memorial in

Hillsboro for their six year old daughter, a victim of the Newtown mass shooting.

According to CeaseFire Oregon, the parents were able to raise \$30,000 in donations to purchase Fred Meyer gift certificates as incentives for folks to turn-in guns. We have invited gun safety folks to organize a gun turn-in as well as a part of our Oct. 1 conference, providing a practical approach to the gathering, not just lofty or emotional speeches.

We hope to raise broader issues as well. What about the larger picture of jobs for many disenfranchised communities which struggle despite President Obama's management of a slowly improving economy?

What about continued racial profiling in what is supposed to be a 'post-racial' environment? How can Geroge Zimmerman go free, ipso facto? Can we sustain a targeted campaign to fight ALEC and the NRA and overturn "Stand Your Ground" laws? Finally, what about the school-to-prison pipeline, also known as the prison-industrial com-

plex?

Locally, with the Portland State University Progressive Student Union, Young Minds of Awareness at McCoy Academy, and the Center for Intercultural Organizing, headed by Kayse Jama, our coalition seeks to address, and fix, some of these issues.

By inviting speakers who have survived gunshot violence themselves, and inviting family and friends of gunshot victims (from Newtown parents to members of the Grant and Martin families), we hope to bring some perspectives from other states regarding what we believe is preventable gun violence.

In a broader sense, in the words of Aeschylus, we hope that this conference will be one step towards "making gentler the life of the world" in concrete ways.

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## Celebrating a Judge's Ruling against 'Stop and Frisk'

### One victory in the fight against racial profiling

BY BENJAMIN TODD JEALOUS

"No one should live in fear of being stopped whenever he leaves his home to go about the activities of daily life."

Those words came from U.S. District Court Judge Shira Scheindlin in her fiery 195-page ruling on the NYPD's "stop-and-frisk" program. After a two-month trial featuring dozens of interviews and statistical analysis of nearly five million police stops, Judge Scheindlin concluded what so many already knew: New York City's stop-and-frisk is an unconstitutional racial profiling program.

Many of us celebrated her deci-

sion in *Floyd v. City of New York* last week, but this is just one victory in an ongoing fight against racial profiling. Within hours of the decision, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced that he would appeal the case.

However, there are a number of concrete steps that are being taken to help fight racial profiling in New York City, across the federal government, and on the state level.

First, a diverse coalition in New York City is supporting the Community Safety Act. The CSA is a set of two bills - one would effectively ban racial profiling by the NYPD, while the other would appoint an Inspector General to create greater oversight and allow victims of stop-and-

frisk to hold police accountable for profiling.

The New York City Council passed the CSA last month despite misinformation and fear tactics by the opposition, but Mayor Bloomberg made good on his promise to veto the bill. It is now up to the City Council members to stand by their principles and override the veto.

Second, last month members of Congress re-introduced the End Racial Profiling Act of 2013. The bill comprehensively addresses racial profiling by law enforcement on a number of levels: by defining the problem, explicitly banning racial profiling, mandating data collection to better understand the problem, requiring law enforcement training on racial profiling, and holding federal officers accountable. The bill has 15 co-sponsors in the Senate and 39 in the House, and the na-

tional conversation around racial profiling has given it significant momentum.

Finally, a number of NAACP chapters and other grassroots groups have reenergized the fight to end racial profiling and other discriminatory laws on the state and local level.

"Trayvon's Law" is a set of guidelines for organizers who want to end the flawed policies that led to Trayvon Martin's death and the inability of the system to hold anyone accountable. It provides a legislative basis for laws to ban racial profiling, repeal stand your ground-type laws, and create accountability for law enforcement and community watch groups.

A group of students called the Dream Defenders have taken Trayvon's Law to heart. For the last four weeks, they have camped out in front of Florida Gov. Rick Scott's

office demanding an end to Stand Your Ground and racial profiling. Many civil rights advocates from all walks of life have joined their fight. Talib Kweli was the most recent high-profile name to join them at the Florida State Capitol.

The Dream Defenders have exemplified Margaret Mead's quote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

Every challenge to stop-and-frisk, racial profiling, and other unjust policies has been the result of a groundswell of ground-level, grassroots activism and support. We can and must apply the same type of grassroots thinking to the larger battle to end racial profiling across America.

Ben Jealous is president and chief executive officer of the NAACP.



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