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New Approach on Drugs

Civil rights groups applaud call for reforms

BY MICHAEL LEIGHTON
PORTLAND OBSERVER

Two major civil rights groups are applauding a call by law enforcement officers in the state to decriminalize drug possession crimes.

"We are encouraged that Oregon law enforcement recognizes that harsh drug laws have been a failure, wasting taxpayer money and disproportionately impacting communities of color," said Kimberly McCullough, legislative director at the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon.

"Criminalization does not help people struggling with addiction and often exacerbates their problems," McCullough said. "There are more effective ways to use Oregon's limited resources to address this public health issue."

Bobbin Singh, executive director of the Oregon Justice Resource Center, said last week's announcement by the Oregon State Sheriffs Association and Oregon Association of Chiefs of Police was "an important contribution to an ongoing conversation about whom we are incarcerating and why."

In a press statement, the police and sheriff's groups pledged to work with the Governor, Attorney General, District Attorneys, the Legislature and other stake-



Bobbin Singh



David Rogers

holder to craft a more thoughtful approach to drug possession when it is the only crime committed. They called for new laws that make drug possession convictions misdemeanors, and recommend that drug offenders be carefully assessed and given individualized, mandated drug abuse treatment as a condition of their conviction.

David Rogers, executive director of the ACLU of Oregon said he was pleased to see Oregon law enforcement leaders promoting a smarter approach.

"Longer criminal sentences are not always the path to justice, safety, or solving challenging social problems," Rogers said. "Policies that prevent people from rebuilding their lives are bad for Oregon. When someone is charged with a felony drug crime it can follow them for life, preventing access to

housing, employment, education, and more."

Singh said the damage caused by trying to address drug abuse and addiction through the penal system rather than through treatment impacts Oregonians' ability to parent their children and participate in their communities.

He was particularly pleased that the law enforcement groups were addressing the impact current drug laws have on Oregonians of color.

"Any conversation about how to address the problem of mass incarceration in our state must prominently feature the voices of communities of color and must take particular account of how these communities are affected by current or proposed policy," Singh said.

Strip Club Murder Confession

BY CERVANTE POPE
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A 23-year-old woman accused of fatally stabbing another woman at a northeast Portland strip club has pled guilty to murder.

Back in June, Rinita Linelle Lowe fled a bloody scene at the Skinn Gentleman Club, 4523 N.E. 60th Ave., and went inside a nearby convenience store where police officers on break arrested her immediately. She has been held at Multnomah County Detention Center since.

New court documents show variations in Lowe's original story,



Rinita Linelle Lowe

wherein she first claimed the victim, Shantina Turner, 29, initiated a dispute with her. Now she says

the knife used in the attack was not given to her for protection during the altercation, as she previously claimed, and admits that the stabbing took place inside the club, not outside as originally reported.

The documents show that witness testimony and security footage reveal Lowe approached Turner at the bar, punched her first, and quickly pulled the knife out of her purse, stabbing Turner at the bar as security guards tried to pull the fight apart.

Turner died at the scene of three sharply forced injuries to her neck, her autopsy shows.

Sugar Mountain Photo Correction: In last week's *Minority Business* issue, a photo for our story on Sugar Mountain Vintage misidentified Jamie Winterlich. Both Winterlich and Hannah Humphries co-own the boutique, but only Winterlich was featured in the photo. We are sorry for the confusion.