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LOCAL NEWS



A person sleeps next to a wheelchair on a park bench, downtown. (AP file photo)

New Approach to Homeless

City Council approves first street response team

The city of Portland is trying a new approach to helping the city's homeless population by stressing compassion and crisis prevention with designated first responders instead of strictly law enforcement by police. The Portland City Council last week approved the plan advocated by City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty that outlines a pilot program called Portland Street Response.

A two-person team will form the first Street Response team and will respond to 911 calls in the Lents neighborhood of southeast Portland that don't involve weapons or use of violence, and will be qualified as trained crisis workers rather than police officers. Examples of non-emergency calls could be about someone lying in the street, people making excess noise in city parks or sus-

pected drug use.

The council approved \$500,000 in May for the pilot program, which is set to start next spring, also drawing support from Mayor Ted Wheeler.

"Historically, it's been up to the police to shoulder most of the responsibility as first responders in crisis calls, but in many cases, police are not the right resources to respond," Wheeler said.

Darren Golden of the Urban League of Portland told Oregon Public Broadcasting the new Street Response effort could help with the relationship between communities of color and the police.

"It's no secret that the black communities in Portland have deep-seated, well-earned mistrust with the Portland police and that is magnified for our black houseless neighbors," Golden said. "It's time for Portland, being the progressive city that it is, to stop taking active steps to criminalize poverty and instead adopt a public health approach to begin repairing our community."

New Leader for Black Parent Initiative

Bahia Overton, a children's advocate with deep experience in the field of social work and serving community-based organizations, is the new executive director for the Black Parent Initiative, a Portland nonprofit established in 2006 to help local African American families achieve financial, education and spiritual success.

The appointment was announced last week by the Black Parent Initiative board of directors, a panel in which Overton has also served.

Overton holds a Bachelors degree in psychology and a Masters degree in social work. She is completing her Ph.D. in social work research, focusing on the experiences of African American female adolescents in foster care. She most recently served as the di-



Bahia Overton

rector of Equity and Partnerships at the Chalkboard Project. She is also the Executive Consultant for Joy DeGruy Publications, assist-

ing Dr. DeGruy in researching historical trauma and developing new models and methods for culturally responsive service delivery.

With over 14 years of practical experience as a professional in the field of social work, she has served as Child and Family Therapist, Curriculum Developer and Culturally-Specific Treatment Specialist in several states, with various community based organizations and government entities.

"As always, the staff and board of directors at BPI are grateful for our community's support as we continue to deliver high quality programs and services to families of black and multi-racial children to break generational cycles, achieving financial, educational, health and spiritual success and well-being," BPI officials said.