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Bewitching Bulbs

A Grim Toll of Shootings, Deaths

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

of Self Enhancement Inc, another school serving African Americans, told the Portland Observer that more police are needed, but also said the effects of Covid-19 have made it harder to reach the youth who are impacted.

“The challenge has always been access to the kids, and those kids having legitimate options and opportunities to be involved in positive alternatives,” he said, pointing to the pandemic restrictions that have prevented a lot of that.

“There has been a lack of opportunities, in part because they have not had access to programs because of Covid,” he said. “We’re still out there providing services, but not at the same personal contact level. You don’t build relationships with kids through Zoom, especially Black kids.”

That’s been one of the major challenges this year, he said, and the lack of personal contact with kids and families has helped proliferate gun violence.

“We need more opportunities, more personal contact,” he said.

Hopson agrees with Mayor Ted Wheeler that more police officers are needed, but says they need to be already involved in the

community.

“I’m in favor of adding more police to the force and specifically police officers who can work with this particular issue — having officer who know the kids and who the kids know and respect makes a difference,” he said. “There’s a preventative side as well as a police side and those two things need to work together.”

Multnomah County District Attorney Mike Schmidt told KATU in September that addressing gun violence is his number one priority, despite his larger goal of reforming the criminal justice system.

Schmidt said arrests and prosecutions are needed now to stem the tide of shootings in Portland.

In the long run, the prosecutor wants to craft more long term solutions.

Portland Police Officer Charles Asheim, a member of the bureau’s Enhanced Community Safety Team that investigates injury shootings, has estimated that at least 60 percent of shootings are connected, acts of retaliation among different gangs.

City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, a lifelong advocate for police reforms, has called for much more reliance on crisis intervention specialists responding

to non-violence 911 calls, instead of police with guns, which she said can exacerbate a touchy situation.

Hardesty is calling for an additional \$1 million to Portland Street Response, which was just recognized last month as an effective program by Portland State University’s Homeless Research and Action Collaborative.

“With Portland Street Response, we’re opening new avenues of care for people who have low or no access to health care,” Hardesty stated. “And each response that provides vulnerable people with compassionate care at the moment they need it most builds a better first response system for all Portlanders.”

Hardesty also wants to see fewer guns on the streets and advocates for a gun buy-back program, strict requirements regarding gun storage, a community mediation program and a new tip hotline.

“The reality is we should have been investing more in this work a long time ago to have helped prevent what we are seeing today,” she stated in response to questions from the Oregonian and published on the city’s website.

“It’s hard to catch up in a crisis,” she said.



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