



OREGONLIVE
The Oregonian

Rod Mourao

June 15, 2017



Fighting crime with support services instead of prisons

Paul Steigleder is a retired deputy sheriff for the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office.

A decade ago, we in law enforcement watched the people we arrested cycle in and out of jails, never doing any real time. We believed that they weren't really being held accountable and needed to spend more time locked up to get the treatment they needed and to stop the cycle of property crimes.



The author argues that new programs providing mental health and addiction services to low-level property crime offenders are more effective than prison sentences. (Oregonian/OregonLive file photo)

I spent nearly 30 years as a deputy, sergeant, and lieutenant with the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office. I have a bachelor's of science in sociology and graduated from the FBI National Academy. Given all that experience, together with my fellow officers, I was sure I knew how to make our communities safer. So in 2008, I supported Measure 57 and the tougher sentencing laws that it promised.

What we failed to do, however, was look at what was driving those crimes. Measure 57 has been a major driver of the women's prison population, and we now know that almost everyone who commits Measure 57 drug and property crimes is struggling with both mental illness and addiction. Locking these people up didn't help with those problems so they came out and continued to re-offend.

Back then, we thought if we held them for a longer period of time, they would get addiction treatment and mental health services. But they didn't. Instead, people came out with felony convictions and couldn't get jobs or housing, typical barriers we see after people are involved with the criminal justice system. As one officer said, "You can get over an addiction. You can't get over a conviction."

What's the alternative? Multnomah and Marion Counties recently created programs that take a more effective approach by diverting these folks from prison, using less money than it would take to incarcerate them, and then use some of those saved dollars to provide intensive supervision, addiction treatment and mental health services.

Today we know that we need to give people that treatment, even if they don't know they want it. And we need to give it to them as many times as it takes. We take these people into our care and custody when they are in crisis, and we know what they need in order to flourish and become responsible members of our community and society.

Now retired, I'm still committed to public safety, but I do so by supporting drug policy and criminal justice reforms that will make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety, promoting alternatives to arrest and incarceration, addressing the root causes of crime and working toward healing police-community relations.

These are the solutions that will have the positive impact that our communities need, which is why I support HB 3078, The Safety and Savings Act, a bill currently being debated in the Oregon legislature. We have seen the impact of Measure 57's mandatory minimums for property crimes that are driven by addiction. It hasn't worked, and it continues to not work.

It's time to do something different, and HB 3078 is a step in the right direction.

http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2017/06/fighting_crime_with_support_se.html