

# Mail Tribune

## Measure 57 the best way to fight crime

By Mark Huddleston

As your district attorney, my office works hard to make sure offenders are convicted and get the tough sentences they deserve. But the reality is, we often see the same people again and again. That's why prosecutors and other law enforcement officers helped draft Measure 57. And now, other statewide organizations you trust, like AARP and Stand for Children, are backing Measure 57 too — because it's the better way to fight crime.

Measure 57 toughens sentences for drug trafficking, theft against the elderly and repeat property crime such as identity theft and has mandatory drug treatment for certain addicted offenders.

Did you know that right now, under current law, someone could steal \$10,000 or more from an elderly person and walk away with just probation? That kind of theft from someone on a fixed income can be devastating, and in some cases life-threatening, as some seniors find themselves scrambling to deal with expensive prescriptions and other health-care costs. Measure 57 would increase available sentences in these types of cases to 16-45 months in prison, depending on the defendant's past criminal record.

Measure 57 increases penalties for the property crimes we see most often, such as theft, identity theft and burglary. It also enhances penalties for big-time drug traffickers who prey on Oregon's children. With Measure 57, those offenders are looking at 58-130 months in prison.

We need these tougher sentences to make sure repeat offenders get the message. But tougher sentences aren't the only answer — there's a reason we keep seeing the same folks again and again. Just ask police officers, the treatment community, corrections officers and judges.

Take a look at the numbers. According to the Oregon Department of Corrections:

- Over 85 percent of incarcerated property criminals are addicted to drugs or alcohol.
- Less than 15 percent receive intensive drug treatment while incarcerated.
- Almost half re-offend after release.

Too often, after release, offenders slip right back into addiction and then slip back into the property crimes and identity theft they use to keep up their habits. With the mandatory drug treatment in Measure 57, we have the opportunity to break that cycle.

Measure 57 is not a one-size-fits-all approach to sentencing. The sentence available to the judge depends on the defendant's past record. Measure 57 also allows judges some discretion in customizing a sentence that's right for the defendant, for the victim, and for the facts of the case.

Measure 57 is also significantly more cost-effective than the competing measure on the ballot, Measure 61. With the economy getting tighter by the day, keeping the state budget at a manageable level will be a real challenge for our legislators when they convene in Salem in

January. The Oregon Criminal Justice Commission estimates that Measure 61 will cost up to \$300 million more per budget cycle than Measure 57. That includes the additional \$1 billion Measure 61 will require to build new prisons.

The truth is, Oregonians are frustrated that a small group of people are committing a large amount of our local property crime. In fact, they are so frustrated that polls show vast statewide support for both measures, indicating that both will get well over 50 percent of the vote. If that happens, whichever measure gets the most votes will become law. Because of that, even folks who would prefer that our limited state dollars be spent in other ways would be well advised to consider voting yes on 57 and no on 61, so that they can make sure the best measure gets the most votes.

Voters have a choice this election year: Are we going to move forward and bring change to Oregon's criminal justice system, or are we going to have more of the same? Measure 57 is the only anti-crime measure on the ballot that holds offenders accountable for their crimes and includes drug treatment to help break the cycle of crime. Passing Measure 57 is the only way to go.

Mark Huddleston is Jackson County's district attorney.