

OPINION

POINT OF VIEW

City ordinance perpetuates crime

By Kim Carter

Under the cover of darkness, like a thief in the night, the San Bernardino City Council on Sept. 8 passed an urgency ordinance that will increase crime and homelessness on the streets of San Bernardino.

The ordinance, which adds Section 19.06.027 to the San Bernardino Municipal Code, prohibits the establishment and operation of new parolee/probationer group homes in the city of San Bernardino. With a single stroke of the pen, and at the urging of City Attorney James Penman, the mayor and the City Council closed the city's doors to some of its neediest citizens, forcing them onto the streets of our community.

In prohibiting the establishment and operation of new parolee/probationer homes in San Bernardino, the City Council is taking away opportunities for concerned citizens who want to provide this crucial service to a population in need. Instead of supporting those who provide this necessary service, the city's ordinance forces them further underground, which breeds unlicensed and unmonitored facilities like the hellish group home recently discovered by San Bernardino police, where 22 poor and mentally disabled people were forced to live in

chicken coops without indoor plumbing.

On the heels of such a horrific event, Penman and the City Council should have taken the opportunity to create sensible guidelines for the creation of such homes, as opposed to prohibiting them outright.

A simple review of the facts makes the need for additional parolee/probationer group homes painfully clear.

Currently, San Bernardino has 10 percent of California's parolee population. Approximately 50 to 75 people return to from prison to San Bernardino each week, as evidenced by the weekly PACT meetings.

According to a report by its own police department, the city of San Bernardino had more than 200 homeless parolees in 2007 and has done nothing to remedy this situation. Penman and the City Council want to pretend that these numbers aren't real — that this population doesn't exist — rather than provide crucial supports and services to those members of the community who have paid their debt and are trying to successfully re-enter their neighborhoods in an effort to build healthy, productive lives and families.

The additional roadblock created by the new ordinance (which is sure to be challenged in the courts) under-

mines real public safety and continues to utilize resources that would otherwise support our teachers and firefighters.

By removing an opportunity for re-entry, our city leaders are setting these people up for a quick return to California's prison system, which according to an audit published recently can't control costs and has no system to track its own spending. The state and federal governments agree that California's prison system is broken and over-crowded. Shouldn't Penman and the City Council be working to develop meaningful solutions to address these problems instead of creating more obstacles?

While we'd all like to live in a world where there were no crimes, no homelessness, no prisoners, and, thus, no one being released from prison, the reality is that increased joblessness, poverty and lack of community investment breed crime; therefore, people go to prison, pay their debt to society, and are released back into the community.

As a community, we must work to develop meaningful solutions to address the needs of this population — in passing the urgency ordinance last week, Penman and the City Council failed us all.

Kim Carter is founder and executive director of Time for Change Foundation in San Bernardino.