

OPINION

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POINT OF VIEW

Some cities prepare parolees to fail

By John Futch

I was saddened to see the article about another parolee housing. (Re: "Parolee limits eyed, Rialto looks at boarding-house proposal," April 13.)

Once again, another city in San Bernardino County is failing to address the root causes of our "quality of life" issues and preparing the parolee to fail. It seems that the message our county is sending out to its former residents returning from prison is "anywhere but my neighborhood."

In order to improve a city, or for that matter a county, there must be opportunity for all of its residents — including those seeking second, third, or even fourth chances — to make a new start.

The article takes pains to point out that, according to an Associated Press study, 29 percent of the 642 inmates released in San Bernardino County have been convicted of a crime involving violence.

While I am opposed to the early release of violent offenders due to state budget cuts, I have to wonder

about the other 70 percent of those 642 prisoners who are non-violent offenders. Like everything else, it seems that good wheat falls with the chaff and those non-violent offenders who might have had a chance at success if they had a safe, drug-free living environment are forced onto the streets by those who are charged with protecting the safety of our communities.

It makes no sense to argue that we're better off — safer, in fact — if there are fewer homes for parolees being released from prison. Does putting former offenders on the streets, rather than placing them in a home where parole officers can find them, make us better off?

Instead of punishing non-violent offenders who have paid their debt to society, if there's a problem with the boarding home itself then punish the homeowner with the laws that are already on the books. If what we're concerned about is quality of life, then instead of targeting recent parolees, cities like Rialto should focus on providing a safe place for them to come home to. They should look at

model programs such as Time for Change Foundation in San Bernardino and the success of its transitional housing.

Instead of causing blight in neighborhoods, Time for Change Foundation's program has demonstrated that our communities are improved when those returning from prison have decent, drug-free homes to help rebuild their lives. All Inland Empire cities should look long and hard at model programs like Time for Change and rely on such programs to house and help those who are homeless and returning from prison.

Quality of life goes further than a single boarding home, it goes to the city itself — how are you going to maintain quality of life when there are people sleeping in doorways in our downtown centers because they have no available housing and must stay within city limits in order to meet the requirements of their parole? Build on programs that have a proven track-record of success — that's how.

John Futch is president of the Time for Change Foundation board of directors.