

Measure 57

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What is it?

Measure 57 would change state law to set tougher prison sentences for certain drug, property and ID theft crimes; require drug treatment for some offenders, and penalize those who refuse treatment.

Where did it come from?

Legislators and district attorneys crafted Measure 57 in special session. While the proposal is viewed as a response to the Kevin Mannix-backed Measure 61, tougher sentencing has been a goal for police and district attorneys well since before that.

Backers say this measure is less costly to implement and less restrictive for prosecutors and judges than the Mannix measure, but still addresses the public uproar over ID theft and drug-driven property crimes.

Measure 57 has broad support from police, sheriffs, district attorneys and groups advocating for families and children.

What it would do:

Measure 57 would increase sentences for dealers of meth and other hard drugs, for drug dealing to minors, for repeat property offenders who are convicted of felony theft, burglary and ID theft. It would make mail theft a felony and also single out crimes against senior citizens for special penalties.

The measure is expected to put about 1,600 more people into the prison system, which now houses about 13,600 inmates.

Unlike Measure 61, Measure 57 would require drug and alcohol treatment for offenders. The Oregon Department of Corrections reports that 85 percent of Oregon's incarcerated property offenders have substance abuse problems, and 49 percent re-offend after their release. Supporters say the only way to stop this cycle is through treatment of the underlying causes.

Reality check:

Measure 57 is projected to cost \$411 million over five years, and the state would need to borrow \$314 million for prison construction - about \$1 billion less than forecast for Measure 61.

Meanwhile, the FBI's national crime stats, released in September, showed both violent and property crime dropping in Oregon and throughout the Northwest. Nationwide, property crime rates dropped for the fifth straight year. This doesn't mean that the level of crime we have is acceptable, but it does offer a framework for any discussion of spending on corrections.

Proponents say repeat offenders, and particularly drug dealers, are the driving force in the property crime wave, so they should be top priority for incarceration. Currently, it takes five convictions before a property criminal is eligible for prison time, says Clackamas County District Attorney John Foote, who backs Measure 57.

It's a serious problem, he said, "if we don't have a system where we mean what we say." However, he and others also feel that punishment without treatment isn't the answer.

Check the fine print:

Measures 61 and 57 are drawing strong support in polling, and some observers expect both measures to pass. If that happens, the one with the most votes will go into effect.

Recommendation:

Yes. The cost of Measure 57 is high, but not as high as Measure 61, and it does address an appalling lack of consequences for such crimes.

The measure also is a better fit for the judicial system than Measure 61, which is essentially a "lock 'em up" response. It also allows judges some discretion in sentencing first-time offenders, and requires drug treatment options that are sorely lacking in the current system and in Measure 61.