

## The Oregonian

# Portland steers anti-gang money to streets

**Agencies lose funding; street outreach workers gain it**

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In a rare move, Portland's new police commissioner is terminating grants for six youth outreach agencies four months early and redirecting the remaining \$120,000 to support eight to 10 street-based gang outreach workers.

Commissioner Dan Saltzman said he decided the grant money needed to be refocused immediately to help stem gang-related shootings with spring and summer approaching.

"Our focus with this money is reducing shootings, killings and retaliatory gang violence," Saltzman said. "What I'm trying to do now is recollect the money and distribute it to those organizations that will really provide outreach on the streets during the summer."

But some grantees called the commissioner's actions a knee-jerk response to a gang crisis and say it won't help youths in the long term. Others say the funding is so minimal, they doubt it will make much of a difference.

"To me, this is a very shortsighted way to solve a problem," said Rebecca Black, director of the nonprofit agency Oregon Outreach. Her agency received \$60,000 in grant money in September and now must figure out how to maintain its summer academic/recreation program for at-risk North and Northeast Portland high school students.

Black said she was on the phone Wednesday morning seeking private sources to make up the \$20,000 in city money her agency will lose. She also has a fundraiser scheduled in March. "If we really care about the kids, I don't think you do it by wiping out prevention and intervention," Black said. "You do it by working together."

Under former Mayor Tom Potter's direction, the city's Office of Youth Violence

Prevention in September distributed \$400,000 among six outreach agencies. The six agencies --Brothers' and Sisters' Keepers; Catholic Charities' El Programa Hispano; Evergreen Housing; Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization; Native American Youth and Family Center; and Oregon Outreach -- each received about \$60,000.

The grant money, which was supposed to extend until August, will end April 30, with the city recouping \$120,000. The city is asking agencies to reapply for the remaining money and expects to allot it to agencies who have employees doing street-based gang outreach for May, June, July and August.

"Our No. 1 target is feet-on-the-street outreach workers, stopping people from going to jail or getting murdered," said Rob Ingram, director of the city's Office of Youth Violence Prevention.

A man was fatally shot inside a North Portland church Dec. 12, and two other gang-related homicides occurred New Year's Eve in Gresham. Since December, gang enforcement officers have been called out to numerous retaliatory-type gang shootings. A 15-year-old boy was shot in the chest Feb. 8, and two men were mistaken for gang members and narrowly missed bullets Monday night outside the Lloyd Athletic Center. Police are expected to announce that they'll maintain extra patrols through spring break and the summer.

Tonya Dickens, a longtime street gang outreach worker who runs Brothers' and Sisters' Keepers, said the city grants had been intended for street outreach but directed to other programs when county money dried up.

Lee Cha, associate director of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, said he's concerned that his agency's outreach with young Asian gang members, who aren't committing the recent shootings but still need help and intervention, will lose services. "This community and these kids are going to suffer."

Saltzman said he believes the recent uptick in gang shootings requires immediate intervention. "This is not meant to be a reflection of the integrity of any of these organizations," Saltzman said. Saltzman and his staff suggested the agencies also apply to the city's Children's Investment Fund for alternative funding.

"I empathize with the way they feel. We'd all like to have more money to invest in outreach, but the fact is we don't. We have to work with what we have."

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