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## **Measure Y takes aim at city's crime**

### Controversial proposal would hire more cops, expand social programs

**By Heather MacDonald, Oakland Tribune**

**Sunday, October 10, 2004** - OAKLAND -- The reaction to the murder of 16-year-old Greshanda Williams several weeks ago was all too familiar for most Oakland residents. As the city mourned the honor student's death, everyone vowed -- once more -- never again.

But despite the outpouring of grief over Williams' slaying, and others like it, a decisive answer to the seemingly intractable problem of violent crime in Oakland has proven to be elusive.

As it has been for the last four years, public opinion in Oakland is sharply divided between those who believe Oakland needs hundreds more police officers and those who say the only way to stop the violence is to focus on alleviating poverty, joblessness and urban decay.

On Nov. 2, Measure Y will ask voters to raise their own taxes to generate \$19.9 million a year. Most of the money, \$9.5 million, would be used to hire 63 more police officers and restart the city's community policing effort.

An additional \$6.3 million would be used to expand social programs that aim to steer youths away from crime, drugs and gangs and steer recent parolees into decent paying jobs.

"We have to break the cycle of violence and reclaim Oakland's youth," said Don Link, a member of the North Oakland Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council and a supporter of Measure Y.

The rest of the money, \$4 million, would be used to end the Oakland Fire Department's practice of flexible deployment, which shuts one fire station on a rotating basis for three days at a time to save money and manpower. The International Association of Firefighters Local 55, the firefighters union, has contributed \$100,000 to the effort to pass Measure Y, the majority of the amount collected by supporters.

Although the measure was crafted to split the difference between those who demanded the hiring of hundreds more police officers and those who urged the council to fund dozens of new social programs, the initiative pleased neither side of the Oakland political spectrum.

"A measure with only more cops or one with only prevention programs won't win," said Councilmember Jean Quan (Montclair-Laurel), citing a number of polls. "If we don't compromise, we'll get nothing."

Two-thirds of voters must vote yes on Measure Y for it to pass. Measure R, a violence prevention measure on the March ballot that emphasized social programs over new police officers, failed a two-thirds vote by less than a percentage point.

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Although Councilmember Nancy Nadel (Downtown-West Oakland) pushed for more money to be included for Measure Y violence prevention programs, she is supporting the measure.

"The urgency of job training for parolees and probationers really drives me to support it," Nadel said. "Without those programs, we're wasting lives and perpetuating the cycle of poverty."

If Measure Y is approved, it would increase parcel tax assessments by \$88 a year for each single family home, \$60 for each rental apartment and \$45 for each commercial space equivalent to a dwelling. In addition, it would raise the parking tax 8.5 percent.

On the left, a group headed by former Councilmember Wilson Riles Jr. is working to defeat the measure, saying the expansion of the police force would be toxic to the community.

"It is a political compromise based on myths and misconceptions," said Riles, who represented the city's San Antonio-Fruitvale district until 1992. "It will continue to perpetuate the injustice of the criminal justice system."

The real problem with the police department isn't the lack of officers but the lack of accountability and mismanagement, said Rashidah Grinage of People United for a Better Oakland.

However, Police Chief Richard L. Word said more officers would allow the department to focus on property thefts and follow-up investigations of nonviolent crimes, Word said.

"Measure Y will pay some nice dividends for the community," Word said. "It's not perfect, but it's balanced."

The 63 additional police officers would allow the department to assign one cop to each of Oakland's community policing beats and direct them to tackle street-level crime and other quality-of-life issues.

"We'll hold them accountable for solving problems, not just racking up numbers of arrests and tickets," Word said.

Measure Y has the support of the Oakland Police Officers Association, which opposed Measure R. The OPOA donated \$20,000 to the effort to pass the initiative.

"More than 63 officers would be nice, but we'll take what we can get," Word said.

Others aren't so willing to compromise, including the other group opposed to Measure Y, which has collected \$26,431 from opponents of the initiative. Landlords and property associations contributed most of the money.

"Sixty-three isn't good enough and we need a plan for more officers," said Charles Pine, a member of the Allendale Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council. "We don't have peaceful streets because we don't have enough officers."

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Pine and other opponents criticize the initiative as vaguely written, adding it does not ensure that the police will increase from 739 officers to 802.

"When you ask me to write a check but there's no guarantee I'll get what I'm paying for, I don't think so," said Steve Edrington, director of the Rental Housing Association of Northern Alameda County. "This measure asks us to throw more money at the problem and promises us nothing in return."

Despite the concerns, the money raised by Measure Y will be used to expand the department to 802 officers, Quan said.

"All of us have to run for re-election -- none of us would break such an obvious promise," Quan said.