



Demonstrators protest Oakland gang injunctions

By Sean Maher
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OAKLAND -- About 50 people protested Thursday outside the Alameda County Administration Building, arguing that the city's anti-gang injunction efforts targeting the North Oakland and Fruitvale neighborhoods are a violation of the communities' civil rights.

A day earlier, City Attorney John Russo applied for the Fruitvale injunction, the second of at least three planned anti-gang efforts. It named 42 men who are believed to be members of the Nortenos gang, which police have linked to half the violence in a troubled section of the Fruitvale district.

"The problem in Oakland is less about gangs and more about violence," said Isaac Ontiveros, an organizer of the rally and member of the recently formed Stop the Injunctions Coalition.

The Fruitvale injunction request focuses on policing and jailing young criminals rather than addressing root problems of joblessness and poor education, Ontiveros argued.

"This solution just ends in imprisonment," he said. "It doesn't change anything."

Last year, Russo sought and won an injunction against a North Oakland gang.

Margaret White, a 45-year-old hospital consultant who lives in the North Oakland injunction area, criticized the city's anti-gang strategy.

"Life will come to a screeching halt" for minorities in the affected communities, she said.

Since the North Oakland injunction took effect, she added, "Kids are afraid to hang out and be who they are. Parents are worried

their sons will be targeted. (Young men, gang members or not) all dress alike, and clothing is part of how they (city officials) describe gang members."

George Galvis, who works in youth and family advocacy in the Fruitvale district, said the area is already a vulnerable community that has been destabilized by immigration raids and gentrification, and the newest injunction effort would do little to address the problems that lead to crime there.

Instead of focusing solely on short-term fixes to address the immediate fear of violence, the city would be better off also investing in a longer-term strategy of quality education and job training for youths, he said.

"The hard-on-crime approach has had 10 or 15 years to pan out," Galvis said. "And it hasn't made anything better. If you gave us 10 or 15 years of prioritizing education and employment like you prioritize police, we'd have shown you results."

In an interview, Russo said he shared some of the common concerns about the anti-gang injunctions, and claimed he has addressed them in how he's formed the policies.

"In other cities where they've done this, the attorney just proves the existence of the gang," he said.

"Then police are free to force the injunction against individuals they reasonably believe are part of the gang, and of course 'reasonably believe' can lead to racial profiling. That's why we don't do it that way in Oakland. That's why we're only naming individuals,



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and why we have to prove in court each time that we have clear and convincing evidence we're right."

Because the injunctions are tailored to individuals, Russo added, he's not touting them as an "end all, be all" solution. He said he agrees that social programs are important, but that "we don't do enough on either side, not as much as we'd like to."

First injunction

Thursday's rally was held shortly before a court hearing on the progress of the North Oakland injunction, which targeted 15 gang members in that district and took effect in June.

Judge Robert Friedman accepted an amicus brief from the Stop the Injunctions Coalition, composed largely of petitions residents had signed against the injunction, but did not accept it as evidence.

Nothing in the petitions suggested the court had erred in granting the North Oakland injunction and the petitions' content was based on "sheer speculation" rather than facts, Friedman said.

City attorneys said they will ask that three new names be added to the North Oakland injunction in the next few weeks.

Of the 15 men named in the first injunction, only one -- Yancie Young, who was arrested in September following a car chase after he allegedly crashed his car and was found to have a stolen handgun -- is fighting the case. None of the other 14 has appeared in court.

"Mr. Young has never been convicted of any gang-related crime," said Michael Haddad, Young's attorney. "He's not a gang member. If they could prove he was, they'd charge him with a crime."

Haddad criticized Russo's office as using "a coward's way out" by filing a civil case rather than a criminal one, because civil cases do not entitle defendants to an attorney if they can't afford one.

Russo responded by comparing the injunction to a restraining order in a domestic-violence case.

"It's a misunderstanding of what the injunction is to say, why don't you wait until they commit the crime," he said. "We're not sending people to jail. We're setting a standard of behavior that you cannot transgress based on your record of abusing this neighborhood. It's like saying, 'Don't worry about the abused spouse, she shouldn't get a temporary restraining order -- wait until he kills her.' "

Impact so far

Since the North Oakland injunction took effect, many local business owners and neighborhood organizers report they've seen some reduction in crime -- though some are hesitant to ascribe that to the injunction.

Q Hakim, co-owner of the Tribu Cafe on San Pablo Avenue, said his shop has been robbed twice since he opened 11 months ago, including once at gunpoint. When he first moved into the neighborhood, Hakim said, "prostitution was rampant. Now, it's not an issue any longer."

The Shattuck Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council has heard numerous reactions like Hakim's, Chairman Don Link said. Drug dealers in the area "are concerned because they're being targeted," he said.

"The injunction selected higher-level players in the turf battles," he added.

However, resident Tay Bledsoe, 28, called the

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injunction a wasted effort.

"That's what the Police Department is there to do anyway," he said. "Why are we spending extra money for what they're supposed to be doing in the first place?"

Russo is expected early next week to file new evidence for the Fruitvale injunction and release photos of all 42 men named in the filing.

Correspondent Frances Tobin contributed to this story. Contact Sean Maher at 510-208-6430.

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