

OAKLAND & RICHMOND Perata proposes conflict teams to cool hot spots Idea is to persuade young people to end continuing violence

Jim Herron Zamora, Chronicle Staff Writer

State Sen. President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland, released an anti-crime plan for Oakland and Richmond on Monday that calls for teams of conflict resolution counselors to be sent into 20 hot spots in order to dissuade young people from seeking retribution to shootings and continuing the cycle of violence.

Perata, at a news conference at the Youth Uprising community center in East Oakland, released a to-do list compiled after a three-hour closed-door meeting with public officials and community activists last Wednesday to discuss the increase in homicides in Oakland and continuing violence in Richmond.

The list includes a variety of measures that fall under the purview of city, county or state government. Perata said he wants to cut across bureaucratic barriers to make it easier for streetwise nonprofit groups, such as Youth Uprising or volunteers from churches, to reach out to disaffected young people or recently released convicts.

Perata's list also includes creating and expanding neighborhood recreation programs for young people, recruiting a cadre of reformed criminals to reach out to would-be gang members and exconvicts and using community groups instead of law enforcement to oversee gun buy-backs.

But the biggest hurdle, Perata said, was just getting everyone to talk to each other and be honest about what works and what doesn't -- instead of fighting to protect pet programs.

"There has to be a level of communication and a level of candor" among law enforcement officials, community leaders and social service providers who deal with crime, Perata said.

He conceded that he has no authority to enact many of his proposals but as head of the California Senate he can use his influence to "kick open any doors that need to be kicked open."

The senator said the state was not going to appropriate much new money, pass any new laws or create any new laws.

Instead, Perata said, state and local government would have to take money -- perhaps millions -- from some existing programs to fund more effective endeavors. He said some new money is becoming available for after-school programs, for drug treatment programs under Proposition 36 and welfare-to-work initiatives that could all be applied creatively to anti-violence initiatives on his list.

Olis Simmons, director of Youth Uprising, which began its program last year, said she agrees that the violence is worse now because it is less predictable than drug turf wars.

"Crime is more relationally-based now than in the past and that makes it more difficult to fight than drug wars," Simmons said.

To prevent young people -- who often already feel alienated from mainstream culture -- from resorting to violence, Simmons said counselors and their programs need street credibility top get the trust of people. "We just can't sit in our offices," she said.

At the news conference, Perata was joined by Simmons, Richmond Mayor Irma Anderson, Richmond police Chief Chris Magnus and Contra Costa Supervisor John Gioia. No Oakland elected officials attended.

Since last Wednesday's meeting, there were two more killings in Oakland and two more in Richmond.

In Oakland, two killings Thursday night brought the city's total for the year to 75, compared to 41 at this time last year. In Richmond, two residents -- Sheila Givens, 42, and Donald Bonner, 47, -- died Saturday night after gunmen inside a car sprayed rounds into a crowded parking lot in the 300 block of 4th Street. That brought the city's total to 22 deaths compared to 19 last year.

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