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METRO NEWS

Garcetti Drafts Bill Proposed by Black Churches

■ **Parolees:** Former inmates would have to pass equivalency exams as a condition of parole.

By MILES CORWIN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Los Angeles Dist. Atty. Gil Garcetti told representatives of an organization of black churches Monday night that he has drafted legislation requiring former inmates to pass high school equivalency exams as a condition of parole and probation.

The leaders of Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches had proposed the idea to Garcetti about four months ago.

On Monday night, Garcetti told the organization that he had taken steps to implement its proposal.

The district attorney's office has drafted the legislation, he said, and the Rev. Carl Washington, who is running unopposed for a state Assembly seat representing southeastern Los Angeles County, has agreed to sponsor it.

Members of the church group had discovered that, according to U.S. Justice Department statistics, 70% of repeat offenders are illiterate.



Garcetti prepares to address LAM members

As a result, members decided that teaching them to read and write could be a way to curb recidivism.

"We'd like to take the lead in encouraging other ethnic groups to take responsibility for educating ex-offenders," said Eugene

Williams, director of the organization. "We'd like to create a multiethnic, multicultural program so people can get the education they need in their own communities."

"African American churches always have held education in

reverence," he added.

"So here's an opportunity for the African American community to provide something for young African Americans who've just been released from prison."

It is still unclear how the program would be funded, Garcetti said. "Every county could do it as they see fit," he said. "Churches and civic organizations would want to be involved. It would be a natural for grants and for the business community because this is a very concrete program . . . and a good way to fight crime."

About a year ago, Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches, which is composed of 25 black churches and civic organizations, decided to push for literacy requirements for prisoners as a way to fight crime.

"People in our community told members of our organization that crime was the issue that they were most concerned about, the key problem that they felt was destroying their neighborhoods," said the Rev. Richard Byrd, pastor of Christ Unity Center. "So we decided to do something about crime in our community."

The organization has proposed setting up and operating its own literacy program in South-Central Los Angeles, using volunteers. **Please see PAROLEES, B8**

PAROLEES: Garcetti Backs Black Churches' Proposal

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to educate parolees.

"If you just got out of prison and can't even fill out a job application, how are you going to go straight?" Byrd said. "Literacy is a fundamental need to survive in our society. And if you can't survive by legitimate means, you're going to turn to crime."

Members of the organization talked to a number of criminal justice experts and visited state

prisons. They discovered that although there are minimal educa-

The organization decided to turn to the district attorney's office for

'If you just got out of prison and can't even fill out a job application, how are you going to go straight?'

REV. RICHARD BYRD

tion programs in prisons, there are no literacy requirements or mandates.

help, and representatives met with several staff members a year ago. But little progress was made.

In June, in the hopes of spurring the district attorney to take action, about 250 members of the group staged an "accountability rally" in front of the criminal courts building, Williams said.

Garcetti met with the group and promised he would investigate their concerns, Williams said.

"He dragged his feet, initially," Williams said. "But to his credit, he came by tonight to tell us what he's accomplished."

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