

Legislation Aims to Fight Drugs, Homelessness

A state lawmaker unveils a package of bills that would ban the 'dumping' of indigents downtown and stiffen penalties for dealers.

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State Sen. Gil Cedillo (D-Los Angeles) announced legislation Friday aimed at addressing long-running problems he called a threat to public health and to the safety of those living on the streets of Los Angeles' skid row.

Cedillo, who spoke at a news conference amid the homeless on San Julian Street, said the package of half a dozen bills aims to crack down on crime while reducing chronic homelessness among addicts and the mentally ill. Among other things, the legislation would ban the so-called dumping of mental patients and parolees in the area and add penalties for dealers selling drugs near homeless shelters and treatment centers.

"We will not tolerate criminalizing the poor. We will not rationalize those who prey on the poor," Cedillo said as he stood beside Los Angeles Police Chief William J. Bratton, City Atty. Rocky Delgadillo and City Council members Jan Perry and Bill Rosendahl.

But no more than 20 yards from the assembled leaders and reporters, the enormous scope of the challenge hit home as the sidewalks were lined with homeless people — some talking to themselves, others sitting silently amid the trash, discarded clothing and cardboard boxes.

A group of about two dozen protesters expressed their opposition by shouting "jobs not jails" and "show us the money." Some of them said the legislation was a ploy by city officials to "bleach" skid row, pushing out poor people in favor of redevelopment and gentrification.

"It's the same response they've always had to social and medical ills," skid row activist Michael Key said of the legisla-

tion. "People come to this neighborhood because it's the only place they can afford housing, or to get sober. But what's going to happen is that people will be priced out of a place to live."

On the other hand, Carol Schatz, president and chief executive of the Central City Assn., a business advocacy group, supports Cedillo's bills, calling them "essential to address long-standing issues." She said those resisting change on skid row are forcing people to "live on the street in dangerous and unhealthy conditions."

Bratton said one object of the legislation was to protect one of society's most vulnerable populations from being victimized by drug dealers, gang members and other criminals.

Toward that end, one of the bills would establish a Downtown Narcotics Recovery Zone, prohibiting anyone on probation from being in the area bounded by 3rd and 7th streets between Main and Alameda Streets.

Exceptions would be made for people enrolled in rehabilitation and treatment programs there.

Another bill would add two years to the sentence of anyone convicted of selling drugs within 1,000 feet of a drug treatment center or homeless shelter.

Three other bills seek to deal with allegations that hospitals and law enforcement agencies outside of downtown frequently have been transporting homeless people into the area. One would prohibit law enforcement agencies from taking people to other jurisdictions for drug treatment or other services unless a space has been reserved in a program. The Community Reunification Act would require the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department to release inmates back to the sheriff's substation or detention facility closest to the place where they were arrested.

Another measure would appropriate \$2.5 million to the California Department of Mental Health and the Superior Court for a program seeking to help chronically homeless people who are mentally ill drug addicts.