

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

On Friday, February Twenty Sixth I attended a public forum hosted by the Eureka Interfaith Fellowship at the Wharfinger Building. The subject was current jail release policies in Humboldt County. This forum was organized due to the brutal murder of Father Eric Freed on New Year's Day. Deemed an important meeting by most everyone in the community, it was well attended with an organized agenda. There were ten panelists representing law enforcement and mental health, including County Sheriff Mike Downey and Eureka Police Chief Andrew Mills. Each of the panelists was able to address the audience and explain their duties and their views of the County's current prisoner release program. For those in the audience with questions, cards were distributed to the members of the audience who would rather jot down a question rather than use a microphone. Those who preferred a mic were also recognized. From what I could hear, the panelists presented themselves well, not taking a defensive stand of any kind, but explaining their role in the release of prisoners and their concern for the problems encountered and their interest in what the general public had to say. I just stated "From what I could hear". Yes that was the weak point of the meeting, the lack of a good sound system. I noted just before the meeting began that one of several mics was not working properly. The portable mic is a wonderful thing and is the only alternative for a panel when a built in sound system is not available. Not everyone (including panelists) is a public speaker and that should be recognized at the very beginning. I had to strain at times to hear what a speaker was saying and I did not receive all the information. There were others in the audience who called aloud that they could not hear. A pleasant, soft spoken gentleman handled the written questions by reading them aloud to the panelist to whom the question was directed. His voice did not carry well and I am afraid that some questions were lost to some audience members. With the meeting still in session, I finally left for home. Disgruntled? No, just discouraged that I was not able to share in what was being said. A word of advice to members of the news media: don't wear hard heeled shoes when walking a hardwood floor to cover a forum. I saw more than one disgusted person in the audience react to the unnecessary racket. I read in the paper later that District Attorney Paul Gallegos said that one panel and one discussion will not yield a solution. I concur. The only thing that I ask for future panels, or for any public meeting for that matter, is a dependable sound system with clarity. To communicate well leads to better understanding. Don't let a poor sound system stand in the way.

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