

# Public safety task force set to review training of police

**Virginia Barreda**  
Salem Statesman Journal  
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A new public safety task force is set to develop recommendations for improving training and certification practices for Oregon law enforcement officials.

Gov. Kate Brown announced her appointees Wednesday to the Public Safety Training and Standards Task Force, which will be chaired by the Governor’s Public Safety Policy Advisor, Constantin Severe.

“Bold action on racial justice and criminal justice reform is long overdue,” Brown said in a release Wednesday. “But words from leaders aren’t enough. We need action.”

The Oregon Legislature is simultaneously looking at six police reform proposals during a special session that consists of measures such as banning peace officers from using chokeholds, the use of tear gas or sound cannons by law enforcement agencies.

The task force will report its recommendations and findings to Brown by Nov.1. The task force is scheduled to have its first meeting toward the end of July, though no specific date is set.

The force is made up of 13 members, including retired Marion County Sheriff Jason Myers.

Myers, who was previously chair of the Board on Public Safety Standards and Training, said ongoing improvements to law enforcement training and accountability are nothing new, though recent protests against police brutality have brought the issue to the forefront of the conversation.

Oregon’s “unique” Department of Public Safety Standards and Training agency serves to standardized training for public safety officials across the state, whereas many states may only have “regionalized” or “inconsistent” training, Myers said.

“We have a really good system set up here in Oregon,” he said. Still, “I think like anything, it’s not perfect. Having a holistic review...I think that’s what everybody wants. That’s how you get the best — is by not being afraid of rolling up your sleeves and try to make improvements.”

Lt. Treven Upkes, a spokesperson with the Salem Police Department, said the department always “welcomes” a training review.

“We’re a learning agency so our policies are reviewed regularly,” Upkes said. “We’re always updating our training, our tactics, strategy, equipment. We’re not static — we’re not doing the

same things that police departments did in the 1930s.”

Upkes said no one from the department has been asked to participate with the task force as of yet.

One of the task forces’ responsibilities will be to give recommendations on how to include additional public participation and inclusion of communities of color.

Upkes said Salem’s department has a recruiting team that is committed to creating a “culturally equitable and competent” hiring process.

One challenge for the task force, he said, could be adjusting the requirements so that all law enforcement agencies — no matter the size or resources — can meet it.

“We have specialists who can take time out of patrol to train, but if you’re a three-person department that doesn’t even patrol 24/7, it’s really hard for them to get all of the training hours that they need in a year -- let alone having the budget to travel or get training to come to them,” he said. “Those are things that need to be considered as well.”

According to a release from Brown’s office, members of the task force will:

- Review current Oregon statutes and administrative rules on police training and certification.
- Identify gaps in current statute, administrative rules, and policies governing officer training and certification.
- Recommend how to apply best practices, research and data to officer training and certification.
- Provide recommendations on how to best incorporate concepts of racial equity into officer training and certification requirements.
- Provide recommendations on use of force training, including best practices of how to incorporate concepts of officer use of the least amount of necessary force to accomplish a lawful objective and de-escalation during a use of force event.
- Provide recommendations on the composition of the Board on Public Safety Standards and Training and how to include additional public participation and inclusion of communities of color.
- Provide recommendations on statutory requirements for officer certification.

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## Clinics

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closed since March due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since then it has referred those seeking those reproductive health services to other health care providers.

The health care to the decision after rounds of focus groups and interviews with other health care providers that began in late 2019.

“As we begin to move away from direct service, we are eager to focus more of our time on creating change at the systems level,” said Katrina Rothenberger, Marion County Public Health Division Director.

Those seeking family planning services at Marion County facilities dropped to 1,346 in 2019 from 6,662 in 2010, a drop of 80%.

Wyatt said the reproductive services program cost about \$1 million each year, which is part of what led the department to make the shift.

“I believe there was only one or two

employees associated with it and they have been reassigned,” Wyatt said.

There were several other public health services Marion County offers that saw steep declines in the past decade.

Though those seeking services like immunizations (1,522 in 2019 from 6,194 in 2019), sexually transmitted infections (808 from 2,946) and tuberculosis (2,168 from 2,560) dropped in the time frame.

Other nearby counties such as Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas, dropped immunization services from their public health authorities in recent years.

Despite the decline in those seeking immunizations and STD and HIV services, Marion County will continue to offer those at the Salem Public Health Clinic location at 3180 Center Street NE in Salem.

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## Dikes

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move both rock walls.

“We’re moving the upper one right now,” Case said. “If we move the lower dike, it’s going to be a huge danger to everybody on the river. I’m very worried somebody will drown.”

And it’s already dangerous.

A large number of trees fell into the stream this year and combined with unusually high water, swept many people floating the river in inner tubes into logs known as “strainers” — because water goes through, but people often don’t,

leading to drownings.

The Oregon Marine Board has considered removing the logs, but ultimately didn’t because of expense, access issues and impact to fish habitat.

### Removing dikes could create risk

The 1,075-foot-long rock wall Case is removing this week predates his ownership of the farm land.

As part of the removal of that rock, Case will reduce the slope and replant the area of riverbank, and it is likely when he does, the river will change channels.

“The first one they’re starting on is the upper dike that the U.S Army Corps

of Engineers put in 50 years ago,” said Dave Duquette, a consultant for Case.

Case constructed the second dike, a 770-foot rock wall, just upstream of the confluence of the North and South Santiam, after repeated floods in 2009.

The removal of the dike will send the river’s current directly into the grove of tall trees, which, once fallen, will likely stretch across the river.

Yon spent over a decade working on Linn County’s water rescue team, frequently being called to rescue people whose watercraft had become snagged in that area on the river.

“Historically and for years, the confluence has been pretty tricky,” Yon said. “There’s some tight turns. This one corner by the second levy, that’s where we’ve picked people up the most.”

The area where the two branches of the river come together has long been prone to flooding.

But its relatively calm waters and easy accessibility make it popular for people who want to float down the river on inner tubes and other water craft.

### ‘Government overreach?’

Case farms about 2,000 acres around Jefferson, including about 1,200 acres he owns, and grows sweet corn on the property in question. Most of this corn ends up at Safeway, Fred Meyer or Walmart.

After the farmland flooded multiple times and washed out vegetation such as trees, he built a 770-foot-long rock wall in the lower section of his farm in 2009.

Case said he got permission to build the dike from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Oregon Department of State Lands, and was told he didn’t need a permit as long as the work stayed out of the water. He said officials with the Army Corps even checked his progress.

But building that dike without a permit and no written authorization brought him under the scrutiny of the EPA and set off a decade of legal fights.

Case and the EPA reached a settlement where he would pay \$100,000, remove both rock walls and restore the banks of the North Santiam River with

native vegetation.

He said he felt pressured to sign the settlement.

Now that settlement could make a bad situation worse for recreation on the river.

“It makes absolutely no sense what they’re doing,” Duquette said.

Case’s settlement with the EPA became official May 31 after a public comment period, and he says he had no choice but to start the work.

At no point before the settlement was reached did the EPA reach out to other impacted government agencies for their input about potential impacts the restorations could have.

“To me this is just government overreach,” said Yon, who has been Linn County’s Sheriff since 2018. “Someone at the EPA, for whatever, reason doesn’t like it. That’s just my opinion.”

“They’ve never stepped foot out there. They’ve never had to go rescue someone. Yet they know and that’s the world we live in.”

A spokesperson from the EPA did not return calls for comment.

Case is spending thousands of dollars moving rock and earth in a move he knows will impact the river, allowing it to form new channels and causing concern by multiple groups, including the Linn County Commissioners.

He also worries that when the water gets high, it will wash pollution and dirt from his farm into the drinking water intake for Albany and Millersburg, located just downstream from the field at the confluence of the two rivers.

“It is not popular with anyone but the EPA,” Duquette said.

Case said even with the agreement, he’s kept fighting, hoping EPA will change its mind.

“I know somebody is going to drown there,” he said.

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