

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton, houses approximately 1,700 adults in custody, according to data from the Oregon Department of Corrections. An officer at the prison is under investigation for supplying drugs to inmates.

BENT investigating officer at EOCI for supplying drugs to prison inmates

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — An officer at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton, is under investigation for supplying drugs to inmates.

Jesse Myer, Milton-Freewater police officer and a detective with the Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team, or BENT, filed a search warrant affidavit Jan. 28 in Umatilla County Circuit Court explaining what set off the investigation.

EOCI in late 2021 and early 2022 saw an increase in the number of adults in custody who tested positive for drugs, specifically methamphetamine and marijuana, according to the affidavit. The medium-security prison from June to November had 20 inmates test positive for various narcotics. But in December, seven men in custody tested positive, and

five were for marijuana. In January, the number jumped to 25 inmates who tested positive, most for meth and marijuana.

The prison had shut-down visitation with inmates on Jan. 4 due to coronavirus restrictions, according to the affidavit, leaving EOCI staff as the only way for drugs to get inside.

One adult in custody, according to Myer's affidavit, provided information that one corrections officer was supplying meth and marijuana products. Then a second inmate came forward and named the same officer. In early January, a third inmate also named the same officer as the drug supplier, saying he saw the officer exchange "balloons" containing meth, cocaine and marijuana with inmates.

A review of surveillance video, the affidavit stated, confirmed the transaction with the inmates.

SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

Bill would offer protections to superintendents

The Associated Press

SALEM — A bill under consideration in the Oregon Senate in the wake of three high-profile dismissals would offer school superintendents some protections from no-cause terminations in the future.

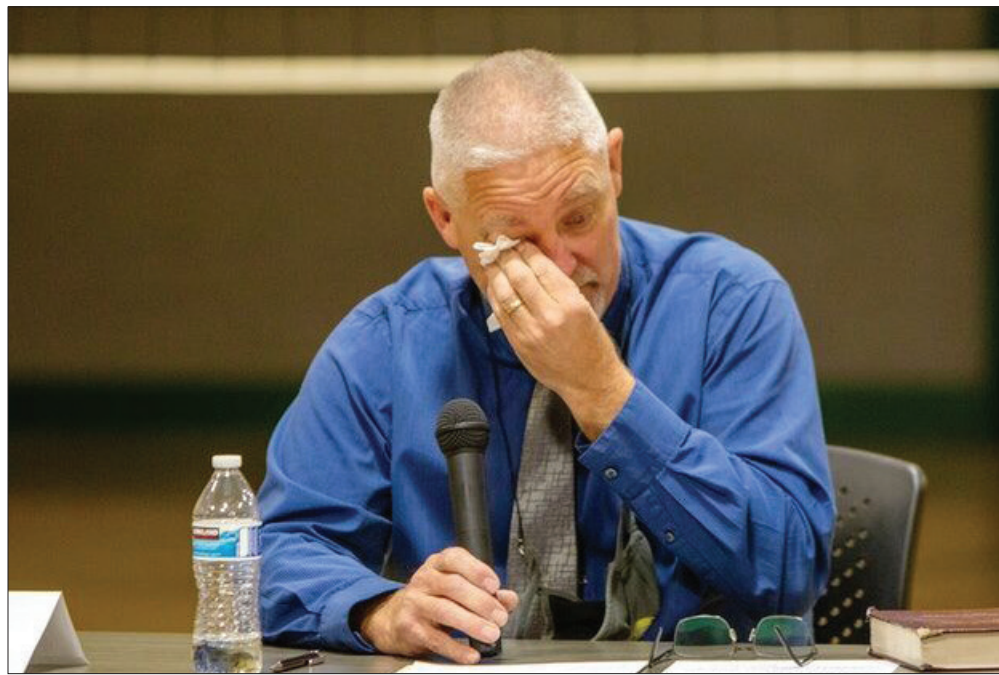
Senate Bill 1521 would require school boards to provide 12 months of notice before the termination of a superintendent with no cause, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported Friday, Feb. 4. They could still fire superintendents with cause.

The bill text also states that a district cannot direct a superintendent to ignore or violate state or federal law or take action against a superintendent who follows state or federal law.

The bill comes after three controversial superintendent firings in Oregon last year in the cities of Albany, Adrian and Newberg.

In testimony before the Senate Education Committee, Coquille Superintendent Tim Sweeney referenced what he called "skyrocketing" levels of superintendent turnover in the state.

"For the current school year, there were 43 superintendent vacancies. And so far, there are already 35 vacancies — with more expected — heading into the 2022-23 school year," he said. "This is out of a total of 216 positions in Oregon."



Austin Johnson/Malheur Enterprise, File

Kevin Purnell gives an emotional farewell to the Adrian community after he was fired by the Adrian School Board on Monday, Aug. 30, 2021.

Opponents of the bill, including the superintendent of a district that is flouting a K-12 mask mandate in its schools, say it would take away local control from the community members who know their districts the best. The bill "is a very controversial infringement of school board authority and autonomy," Marc Thielman, superintendent of the Alsea School District, said at public hearing Thursday, Feb. 3.

Thielman is running for governor and has crossed swords more than once with the state health authorities over mask mandates in his schools.

Other than Thielman,

superintendents who submitted testimony have been overwhelmingly supportive of the legislation.

One of the recently dismissed superintendents, former Greater Albany Public Schools Superintendent Melissa Goff, shared written testimony in support of the bill. Goff shared how newly elected school board members changed the board's majority and dismissed her a few months after renewing her contract.

"The chaos that ensued disrupted the beginning of the school year for staff and students, caused anxiety and concern for many of our families, particularly families of color with whom

I had worked closely, and cost Greater Albany Public Schools the equivalent of at least four full-time teaching positions," Goff wrote.

"We are seeing even more dramatic negative impact in Newberg schools right now, thus emphasizing the need for Senate Bill 1521."

In Newberg, several administrators have left the district in the wake of Superintendent Joe Morelock's firing in November.

Two school board members who voted to fire Morelock appear to have recently survived a recall election, although final results will not be certified for several more weeks.

Rescuers return bald eagle to Yakima Valley after treatment for lead poisoning

By DONALD W. MEYERS
Yakima Herald-Republic

PARKER, Washington — The bald eagle didn't waste much time once the cardboard box that held him on a trip from Pendleton to the Sunnyside Canal near Parker, Washington, was opened.

The raptor took a couple steps out of the box and, with a flap of the wings, was airborne, flying across the rest area along the Yakima Valley Highway, alighting on a nearby tree and surveying the area, to the delight of the volunteers from the bird rescue group that had released him.

"It's perfect," said



Donald W. Meyers-Yakima Herald-Republic
A bald eagle Blue Mountain Rescue recently released near Sunnyside Dam in Parker, Washington, surveys the area from the top of a tree Jan. 29, 2022.

Shelly LaPierre-McAllister, one of the eagle's rescuers. "He is

there (in the tree) and getting his bearings."

For the group, the release was a happy ending to the eagle's story, as well as a reminder of the danger that lead fishing weights and shot pose to wildlife, especially raptors.

The bird was found the morning of Jan. 9 near Zillah, suffering from lead poisoning. But, thanks to volunteers from Pendleton-based Blue Mountain Wildlife, he was able to recover and return to the Yakima Valley.

Blue Mountain works with orphaned, sick and injured wildlife, treating them so they can be safely released back into the wild, as well as educating the public on how their actions affect the environment and wildlife.

LaPierre-McAllister

said she and her husband received a call from Yakima County dispatchers about a sick eagle found near Zillah.

"He was really, really sick," LaPierre-McAllister said. "He was laying on his chest with his wings out."

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