

## Taxpayer Lawsuit Challenges Use of Oregon Jail for Immigration Detention

***Oregon law expressly forbids public resources to be used for federal immigration detention***

A lawsuit filed by several Oregon taxpayers is challenging the use of a publicly funded jail to detain non-citizens on behalf of the federal government. For the past 30 years, Oregon law has prohibited local law enforcement to engage in federal immigration enforcement. The Northern Oregon Regional Correction facility (NORCOR) is a public jail located in The Dalles and funded by Hood River, Wasco, Sherman and Gilliam Counties. Since 2014, in addition to housing local inmates, NORCOR has been housing people the federal government wants detained for immigration purposes—even though Oregon law expressly prohibits using state or local public funds for federal immigration enforcement.

“NORCOR officials have been violating Oregon law by using taxpayer money to detain people for federal immigration purposes,” said Jessica

Campbell, Co-Director of the Rural Organizing Project, a statewide network of over 60 groups organizing for human dignity across Oregon. “This is not only a violation of the law, it’s a violation of the trust Oregonians have in their locally elected officials and their public institutions.” Campbell and others, none of whom are directly involved in the lawsuit, have been advocating for NORCOR to end its program for immigration detention.

NORCOR, located in The Dalles, Oregon, is a public entity constructed in 1999 specifically to house inmates from the four counties that finance it. The construction of the NORCOR facility was financed by taxpayers under a General Obligation bond and more than half of the facility’s annual operating expenses are paid for by taxpayers, including roughly \$2 million provided by Wasco County taxpayers.

In 2014 NORCOR officials contracted with the federal government to house people the federal government wants detained due to immigration issues, even though Oregon law has prohibited the use of state or local funds on federal immigration enforcement for

three decades. Oregon Governor Kate Brown recently re-affirmed this principle when she declared Oregon a sanctuary state. By using Oregon resources for federal immigration in violation of Oregon law, the case contends that NORCOR is misusing taxpayer money.

“We applaud the courage of those who are challenging NORCOR’s use of local public funds and hope that NORCOR stops detaining people for federal immigration purposes,” said Andrea Williams, the Executive Director of Causa Oregon, a statewide immigrant rights organization. “We must uphold the integrity of Oregon’s 30 year-old law that limits our local resources from being used to enforce questionable federal immigration policies,” explained Williams, who is not involved in the lawsuit.

Lawyers for NORCOR will have an opportunity to respond to the lawsuit before the judge makes a decision.

Stephen W. Manning, a lawyer with Immigrant Law Group PC, and a member of the Innovation Law Lab, represents several of the taxpayer plaintiffs.

## Columbia County Jail Operating Citizens Advisory Committee Needs Three Members

***Representatives from Vernonia, Rainier, Warren, Deer Island, St. Helens, areas preferred***

The Columbia County Jail Operating Citizens Advisory Committee (JOCAC) is looking for three new members to serve three-year terms. The committee advises the Columbia County Board of Commissioners and the County Sheriff on proper spending of funds raised by levies for operating the Columbia Coun-

ty Jail. They also report periodically to the board and explain to county residents how funds are being distributed.

JOCAC was formed in 2014 to ensure accountability and transparency to taxpayers following the passage in 2013 of a \$7 million bond to operate and maintain the 255-bed facility. The levy was renewed by voters in 2016, and is expected to raise \$8 million through 2021 based on 57.9 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value.

Jail operating levies are needed because the county’s general fund does not cover the revenue required to run the facility. Jail dollars come from a combination of some general fund monies, additional funds from levies, and the U.S. Marshal’s Service (USMS).

The Columbia County Jail is a cost-efficient operation that uses the concept of directing inmate movements by a central control room, thereby reducing the number of staff needed to run the facility. It was also built to handle non-county inmate populations, allowing the Sheriff to recover some operational costs by renting beds to outside agencies such as the U.S. Marshal’s Service. In 2016, USMS inmates added about \$200,000 to operating costs while generating \$1.9 million, thus adding considerably to available revenue and driving down taxpayer costs.

In 2015, JOCAC prepared a report that noted the Columbia County Jail had been operated well and funds were used properly and efficiently. The report also noted that the rate of failures to appear for court fell, early release of inmates was eliminated and the jail reached a goal of 100 beds available for local inmates.

JOCAC meets monthly at the

Sheriff’s Office at 901 Port Avenue in St. Helens. The committee receives briefings on the jail budget, operations, personnel hires, and equipment upgrades and replacements. Members of the committee review and make recommendations on these expenditures and verify that all funds raised by the levy are spent on jail operations.

“The 2014 report shows not only that jail funds are being used in the way they were intended, but that true citizen input is important and necessary for county operations,” said Commission Chair Henry Heimuller. “I will say that the committee has been remarkably successful, and I know the Sheriff and community members feel the same.”

The committee is composed of nine volunteer members appointed by the County Board of Commissioners. Those interested in serving should have an understanding of budgeting procedures and have an interest in public safety. The deadline to submit applications is on-going. A Volunteer Application Form can be found online, at the County Courthouse, 230 Strand St. in St. Helens, or by contacting Jan Greenhalgh at (503) 397-432 or [jan.greenhalgh@co.columbia.or.us](mailto:jan.greenhalgh@co.columbia.or.us).



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