

# Sheriff reverses course on plan to end in-person visits

*Plan drew negative feedback from the public, county officials*

BY EMILY GREEN  
STAFF WRITER

Multnomah County Sheriff Dan Staton will not move forward with plans to eliminate in-person visitation at county jails, according to a news release sent from his office Tuesday.

Staton's decision comes after Street Roots broke the news about his plan to eliminate in-person visitation by the end of the year ("Captive Consumers," Street Roots, Jan. 2) and subsequent stories in other media drew angry complaints from readers.

The news also prompted Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury and Commissioner Loretta Smith to approach Staton on the matter, urging him to preserve in-person visitation.

"Sheriff Staton has listened to feedback from the public regarding video visitation throughout this process. Sheriff Staton made the decision to maintain an in-person "through the glass" visiting option for visitors," states the news release.

In 2013, Staton signed a contract with Securus Technologies Inc., agreeing to replace all family and friend in-person visits at county jails with Securus video visiting. In-person visits are conducted with a sheet of plexiglass separating the inmate and visitor. Securus requires the elimination of in-person visitation in its contracts in order to boost profits generated by video visits.

Before Tuesday's announcement, by the end of the year the only way to visit an inmate in county jail would have been through a video terminal, which has attached phones for audio and a small display screen for visual. Visits connecting visitor terminals in the lobbies of Multnomah's two county jails to inmate terminals within the jails are free, but there

is a charge for remote visits, which are conducted with a visitor using a personal computer on one end and an inmate using a Securus terminal on the other.

But the sheriff's office says now video visiting will be an added option, not the only option.

Remote visits currently cost \$5 for a 30-minute visit, but the cost is expected to increase once installation is complete.

"The contract amendment has been verbally agreed to and will be completed by the end of the week," the announcement states. "Sheriff Staton will continue to review social visiting processes and video visiting processes over the next six to eight months to ensure all concerns are taken into consideration."

The Sheriff's Office said the changes resulted in no additional costs.

Studies conducted by Prison Policy Initiative and the U.S. Department of Justice found that, when used in addition to in-person visitation, video visiting has many benefits to inmates and their families. Now inmates can conduct visits seven days a week. In-person visitation is available only two days a week. Its remote capability also allows visitors living far from a facility the option of visiting without having to travel.

As a result of the contract between Securus and the county, two other out-of-state corporations are also profiting off inmates and their families — many of whom are living in poverty.

TouchPay profits from charges on inmate account deposits, and Numi Financial profits from debit cards given to inmates upon their release. The debit cards hold any cash the inmate had on his or her person at the time of arrest, and he or she has five days to get the cash off the card or it begins to incur fees.

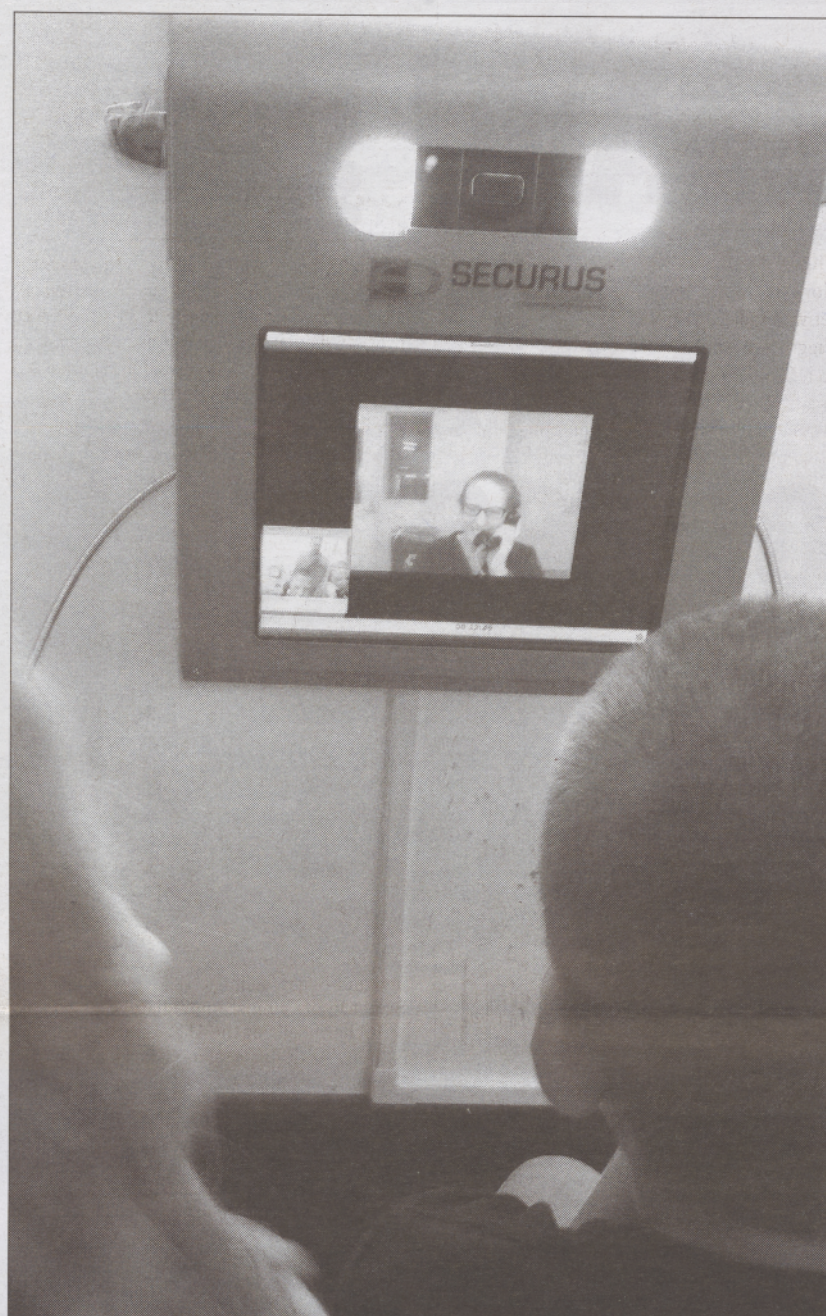
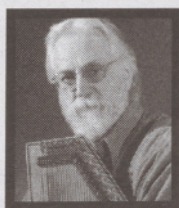


PHOTO BY STEVE BRASE

A Securus video-visit terminal similar to the ones going into Multnomah County jails.



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