

# State, counties look for ways to avert prison expansion

By PARIS ACHEN  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown urged lawmakers, counties and state agencies Tuesday to work together to reduce the state's prison population before March and avert a \$9 million emergency expansion at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras.

Lawmakers have indicated the only way to pay for that expansion is to raid a state fund designed to keep offenders out of prison.

Such a move could doom Oregon's justice reinvestment — the concept of investing in county-level programs that support and supervise offenders who otherwise might be sent to prison, Brown said.

Brown's office organized a meeting in Salem Tuesday of more than 300 representatives from the state's 36 counties to discuss options for quickly decreasing the influx of prisoners.

"I'm here today because I believe there is still a chance that this worst-case scenario will not come to pass," Brown said. "It requires all of us to take a leap of faith."

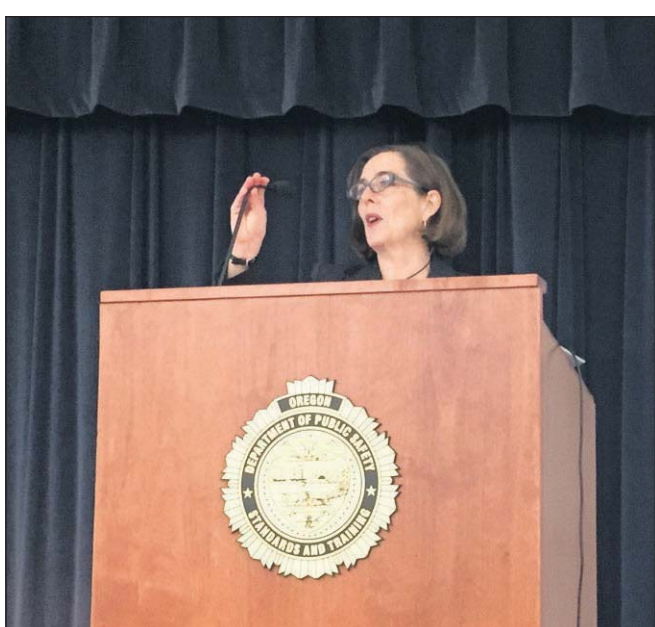
## Tug-of-war

The tug-of-war between the demand for prison space and justice reinvestment began in October when the state Office of Economic Analysis projected that the male prison population would grow faster than previously anticipated. That unexpected growth would require the Department of Corrections to add 150 to 200 prison beds by March.

Longer sentences and a spike in probation revocations are contributing to the growth, said Mike Schmidt, executive director of the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission.

Even so, justice reinvestment grants have helped the state avoid prison costs of about \$19 million, Schmidt said.

As an example, the total number of months that first-time offenders spent in prison



Gov. Kate Brown speaks to more than 300 representatives from Oregon's 36 counties during a meeting Tuesday on reducing the state's prison population.

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Gov. Kate Brown

for property and drug crimes decreased by 3,270 months between 2012-13 and 2014-15, according to the criminal justice commission.

Without justice reinvestment, Oregon already would have had to expand Deer Ridge Correctional Institution and move forward on planning construction of another prison, said Colette Peters, director of the Department of Corrections.

## Stave off expansion

To stave off the Deer Ridge expansion, the state would need to slash the number of male prison intakes by 25 each month starting in December, according to an analysis by the criminal justice commission.

Another idea for reducing the prison population is to allow prisoners approved for short-term transitional leave to be released earlier, said Scott Taylor, director of Multnomah County Department of Community Justice. Under law, those prisoners can be released up to 90 days early into a transitional program that helps with education, employment and housing. The Legislature, however, could increase the early release period to 120 or 150 days, Taylor said.

The criminal justice commission is analyzing the effect that change would have on the prison population.

The Legislature established the justice reinvestment fund in 2013. The move

simultaneously lowered sentences for property and drug crimes, all in an effort to ebb the flow of offenders into the prison system.

## 'Snowball effect'

The Legislature approved \$14 million in county grants for 2013-2014 and \$40 million in county grants for 2015-17. The \$9 million Deer Ridge expansion would come from the money earmarked from the county grants.

"This would cause a snowball effect," Brown said. "Next year's (grant) disbursements would be significantly reduced. It also will lead to a reduction of services, which means continued increases in the prison population. As prison bed use goes up, the justice reinvestment fund will go down, or worse, go away, and we will all be frustrated by a program we failed to fund adequately."

Lawmakers would have to sign off on the budget change. House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson, D-Portland, asked county representatives to talk to their legislators and urge them to keep the fund intact.

Lane County Commissioner Jay Bozievich said he is angry that state leaders are putting the onus on counties alone to reduce prison costs.

"What is the state doing about the cost of our prison system rather than looking at the counties and taking away money from the counties?" Bozievich asked.

Asked whether Brown would veto attempts to use justice reinvestment money for the prison expansion, a spokesperson said the office generally doesn't "speculate on hypotheticals."

Brown has asked the Corrections Department to hold off for as long as possible on expanding Deer Ridge while counties and others look for ways to reduce the prison population.

*The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.*

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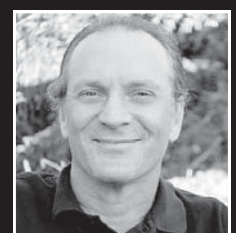
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**A:** Restart your computer. At the log-in screen, DO NOT ENTER YOUR PASSWORD. Instead, click on the power icon at the bottom right of your screen and select "Restart." Your computer will probably install an update and perform normally after that. This has worked for many customers, saving them a costly trip to the service department. Have a problem with your computer? Sometimes the fixes are quick and easy. Check with us.



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**Q:** What's a good guideline for BTUs?

**A:** The most simple guideline for understanding BTU ratings is the higher the number, the greater the heat output of the burner. Conversely, the lower the BTU number, the less heat output. In culinary endeavors, both high and low BTU ratings are very desirable for optimum cooking performance.



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**Q:** When should I bring my child to the dentist for the first check-up?

**A:** Before this first appointment, it is very important for all to realize that the child's teeth are very important in the development of his/her jaw. As soon as they begin to erupt, at approx. 6 months, it is so important to keep the baby teeth cleaned. You may use a soft brush or a finger gauze. Baby teeth accumulate plaque and bacteria just as adult teeth. Also, please be aware and careful of nighttime nursing bottles and a lack of cleaning the child's teeth which may lead to a condition called nursing bottle syndrome (lots of decay). If all this is followed, teeth look good, child has no complaints, then first visit somewhere around age 2-1/2 to 3 is a good time to check.



**REBECCA SEDLAK**  
Coast Weekend Editor  
**THE DAILY ASTORIAN**  
949 Exchange St., Astoria  
503-325-3211, x217

**Q:** How do I get a story about my event in Coast Weekend?

**A:** We plan what our feature stories will be, anywhere from two to six weeks in advance, so let us know early if you have something going on that you think would make a good feature. For smaller stories, the deadline for getting press releases and photos to us is noon Wednesday, one week before the next Thursday's publication. Email your information to rsedlak@dailyastorian.com or call 503-325-3211, ext. 217. Be sure to include a contact name, email and phone number. If you just want to post an event on the online calendar, you can go to coastweekend.com/calendar and follow the instructions.

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