



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Andrea Gonzalez spoke at a rally in Astoria in July against repealing Oregon's sanctuary law.

Gonzalez: Has been part of opposition on several fronts

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Gonzalez, a member of the Lower Columbia Hispanic Council, came in contact with the ACLU at a recent conference. She was asked to take part in the ad, which was filmed that same day.

"We knew about the conference itself, but the opportunity to be in the video presented itself that day, and I

just decided, I guess, to be a part of it," she said.

Gonzalez has been part of the measure's opposition on several fronts, including a rally in Astoria in July.

She is not the first person from Clatsop County to weigh in on the issue to a broader audience. Sheriff Tom Bergin penned a letter in August supporting the measure, with 15 other sheriffs from around the

state signing on.

Bergin cited respect for the law and an ability to ease local law enforcement's relationships with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement as reasons to support the measure. He added that, if the sanctuary law is repealed, the sheriff's office would not question someone solely about their immigration status.

Crime: 'Right now, the weak link in our criminal justice system is the jail'

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Public safety is a theme in the campaign for a new jail — the red-and-white signs for the November bond measure say "Keep our streets safe!" Violence like murder or rape is rare, but a thick stew of assaults, threats, sex abuse, theft and drug- and alcohol-fueled crime has kept the county near the top.

The state crime rankings, adjusted for population, are tied to the county's drinking culture and the lack of substance abuse and mental health treatment options. But the rankings are also inflated by visitors who have made the North Coast one of the state's most popular getaways.

Last year, 27 percent of the more than 2,400 bookings at the jail were people who live outside the county.

District Attorney Josh Marquis said the long-running crack among attorneys is, "Come on vacation, leave on probation."

"It's become a very desirable place for a lot of people to live and recreate," Marquis said. "Unfortunately, a microcosm of that, is that it has also become a popular place for some people to prey on those people."

Marquis emphasizes his point by comparing Clatsop County — with a population of about 39,000 — with Columbia County to the east, at 51,000. Columbia County ranked 16th in 2017 in behavioral crimes, 28th in crimes against people and 28th in property crimes.

"No offense, but who says, 'Oh, gee, let's go spend the weekend in Scappoose or, you know, St. Helens,'" Marquis said. "It's just not a destination."

Lodging tax

The large share of out-of-county jail bookings was part of the rationale county commissioners used this summer for a 1 percent lodging tax to help pay for operations at a new jail.

Leaders in the tourism industry fought the lodging tax and are increasingly punching back against the perception that visitors are driving the county's crime rate.

"I rail against the idea of vilifying our guests, who are part of an industry that creates a lot of jobs and a lot of revenue for our county," said David Reid, the executive director of the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce.

While some visitors who stay in hotels commit crimes, Reid believes there is no direct

CRIME REPORTS

The Oregon Uniform Crime Report tracks offenses by county. Rankings for 2017 are based on reported crimes per 100,000 population.

***Behavioral** — Covers disorderly conduct, drunken driving, liquor, drug and other crimes. (Clatsop, Coos, Jackson, Benton, Marion)

***Persons** — Covers assaults, threats, sex abuse and other crimes. (Clatsop, Morrow, Douglas, Jefferson, Jackson)

***Property** — Covers theft, fraud, burglary, vandalism and other crimes. (Multnomah, Jackson, Marion, Coos, Clatsop)

correlation with the 27 percent of out-of-county jail bookings.

As the tourism industry becomes more sophisticated at marketing the North Coast, raising the quality of the experience and stressing visitor spending over volume, part of the message will be how people can enjoy the region responsibly.

"The conversation about teaching people how to enjoy our area is an increasing one," Reid said. "It's something we're getting a little better at."

Difficult to measure

The Oregon Uniform Crime Report is the best statewide overview of offenses reported by law enforcement, but the data is limited. Not all law enforcement agencies consistently submit reports.

Clatsop County generally has a good reporting rate, but Warrenton police, for example, did not participate in 2017, so the county's totals are lower than what they should have been.

The county's placement near the top of the state crime rankings is not in isolation, however, nor is the idea visitors influence the crime rate. "Our numbers are way too high for our population," Chief Deputy Paul Williams, of the sheriff's office, said.

Last year, The Daily Astorian documented how the county was among the highest in the state for sending people to prison for drug and property crimes. In 2016, the newspaper showed how roughly 40 percent of drunken-driving cases each year involve people who live outside the county.

Marquis and Bergin have well-earned reputations for being tough on crime and skeptical of criminal justice reform. As the most visible advocates for a new jail, they

are targets of critics who claim they only want more cells to lock people up.

But Marquis is retiring as district attorney at the end of the year, and Bergin has said he will not run for re-election as sheriff in 2020, so others will have the chance to set policy.

"These are much, much larger forces than any one person can control," Marquis said.

Overcrowding

The debate over a new jail has mostly focused on inmates who are released early because the 60-bed jail in Astoria is overcrowded. Last year, 459 inmates were forced out early, according to the sheriff's office. A new jail at the former North Coast Youth Correctional Facility in Warrenton would have 148 beds with the potential for expansion.

Increasingly, though, the question for policymakers is not how many inmates should be in custody, but whether jail space is being used effectively.

Over the past year, the county, led by Judge Paula Brownhill, the presiding judge of the Circuit Court, has tested a new pretrial release policy to try to lower the high percentage of inmates at the jail who are awaiting trial. Using risk assessment tools, the county weighs an inmate's risk to public safety, the likelihood of new criminal activity, the threat to victims, and the probability the accused will appear for court.

As part of Oregon's push to reduce state prison use — known as justice reinvestment — the county is also encouraged to supervise more criminals locally through jail or probation. One of the strategies is to use sanctions — including short-term stays in jail — to control behavior, which is difficult when the jail is overcrowded.

With more jail space, more inmates convicted of crimes would serve their full sentences, while the county would have more flexibility to use the hammer of jail time to enforce probation.

"Right now, the weak link in our criminal justice system is the jail, and it has been for a couple decades," Williams said.

For Marquis, a new jail would help send the message that there are immediate and real consequences for getting arrested. The fear of consequences, over time, might help reduce the crime rate.

"That information, you don't need to paste it on Facebook for it to be known, and for it to be common knowledge pretty quickly," he said.

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