

Fighting for the Innocent

continued **▲** from front

deemed state property.

As for Oregon, the overall prison population stands at 13,438 strong.

With \$135,000 earmarked for the Oregon Innocence Project's initial annual budget, about half those monies are designated to the full time legal director position. The rest of that money goes towards investigations, administration, testing, experts, and whatever is necessary to litigate and review the cases.

Research shows that number one reason people continue to end up in jail unjustly is eyewitness misidentification.

Kaplan explains how incorrect identifications can stem from a number of reasons; everything from what's shown to the eyewitness; the method of which evidence and suspects are displayed to a witness; and

other factors which can corrupt the ability to properly I.D. someone.

Puracal, also an appellate attorney, says 30 years of science proves how malleable human memories really are, something she's experienced firsthand. In 2012 she successfully represented her brother Jason Puracal, an American, attaining his freedom after he had spent nearly two years in a Nicaraguan jail on false drug charges.

Puracal calls cases like her brother's and others, "opportunities" to examine what went wrong in the criminal justice system.

One of the key components of the work by the Oregon Innocence Project is keeping it absolutely pro bono for any clients they take on.

Operating in conjunction with the Oregon Justice Resource Center and Metropolitan Public Defender Services, Inc., the Oregon Innocence

Project is currently supported mostly by private donations. Moving forward, Kaplan says their services should ultimately be supported by the community.

"So that means that whether it's government funding or it's private funding, we as a community have to look at it, and say, we've created this system. This system has flaws in it, we can see the flaws, we know what they are so we have to take a responsibility for that—and that's a financial responsibility," Puracal says.

"The most important thing is that the defendant, the inmate, that he not be paying for the state's mistake. That shouldn't be his responsibility," Kaplan says.

The justice advocates say it's also going to take the community's support to help innocent inmates transition into the 'real world' once they are liberated.

"It's a really hard life when you get out. In fact, in a lot of states people who are exonerated, even after being in prison wrongfully 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, don't even get the same services as a parolee," says Kaplan, "When we've taken someone's life away, especially for many, many of the mostly—I'm gonna say men—we've taken away the years of their life where they would be in school, getting job training, starting families, all this, and they lose that opportunity."

Twenty-seven states have some form of a compensation law for men and women who have been found innocent after serving time behind bars, though the services and payout differ in each state and can take years to fully collect. Oregon is not one of these states.

Part of the Oregon Innocence Project's work will include getting a law on the books that helps people unfairly convicted "get back on their feet" once out.

Puracal's brother was assaulted multiple times in prison and starved

so much he lost 30 pounds. Once out, he explained in an interview with Associated Press that the goal of helping his young son, who was affected with Down Syndrome, was what gave him hope behind bars.

"I was always thinking of him. I knew I needed to endure this, to get out, and reunite with him. He gave me hope," the now 37 year old exonerated prisoner explained.

His sister says Jason has adjusted well back into life to a large extent because of the services and support he received from the community upon his release.

Puracal says the people of Oregon and around the globe will all be necessary pieces to help the wrongly convicted get back in sync.

The Oregon Innocence Project urges people to support them by volunteering their time or making financial contributions. For more information about the organization and how to help, visit oregoninnocence.org. For more information on the national organization, visit innocenceproject.org.

46 Million Rides

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When the Yellow Line opened in 2004, there was a 50 percent increase in the number of new businesses along the avenue, and that

number continues to grow. About half a dozen housing developments have opened or are under construction within walking distance to the MAX stations.

There are more than 360 new

housing apartments and condos along Interstate Avenue since the Yellow Line opened in 2004, TriMet officials said.

One of the first apartment housing projects to open was the 54-unit Patton Park that was built on the site of a rundown hotel. Opened in 2009, it provided the first large-scale af-

fordable housing along Interstate Avenue that included a dozen family-sized units with three bedrooms. The building also houses a bi-lingual daycare facility on the ground level.

With a focus to bring displaced residents back to the community, qualified first-time buyers for the 57-unit Killingsworth Station condominium project were eligible for down payment assistance through the Portland Housing Bureau's Down Payment Assistance Loan program. The housing bureau partnered with the Minority Homeownership Assistance Collaborative to identify and select eligible households to receive these loans.

Since the decision to build the metro area's first MAX line in 1980, there has been more than \$11.5 billion in development within walking distance of the MAX stations, TriMet officials said. Light rail is a proven catalyst for development.

The transit agency has also worked to support local contractors. By eliminating barriers for small businesses, often minority- or women-owned, TriMet has created a national model of inclusion for

Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) firms who previously have been unable to compete for large construction contracts.

DBE firms secured 18 percent or \$35 million of Yellow Line contract dollars. Fast forward to the Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail Transit Project now under construction where a record 127 DBE firms have worked on the project, totaling \$154 million in contracts.

"It's been so gratifying to see how we've helped these small firms grow their business, expand into new areas and create family-wage jobs for others," said McFarlane.

The MAX Yellow line opened four months ahead of schedule and about \$25 million under budget. It expanded the MAX system to 44 miles with 64 stations.

Since the Yellow Line opened in May 2004, the MAX system has expanded to 52 miles and 87 stations serving all three counties in our region. The MAX Green Line opened in 2009, and the region's sixth MAX construction project, the Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail Transit Project will open on Saturday, Sept. 12, 2015 bringing the MAX system to 60 miles and 97 stations.

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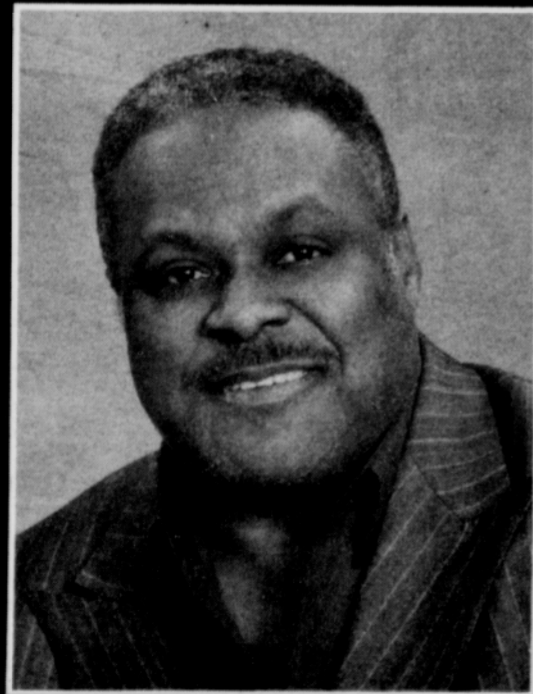


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