

Nurses Call for Removal of Health Officials at Mult. County Jails

97% of Nurses Working in Corrections Passed a Vote of 'No Confidence'

In an effort to improve health-care outcomes and address long-standing problems, frontline nurses at Multnomah County corrections facilities are calling on county commissioners to remove multiple members of the county health department's corrections management team. Nurses are demanding several administrators be replaced following allegations of gross mismanagement that undermined patient safety, created a hostile work environment and led to a health staffing crisis.

On April 25, nurses shared the results of a no confidence vote and a letter with county commissioners calling for Multnomah Corrections Health Director Zachary Myque Obiero and nursing supervisor Nikki Propert to be removed from their positions and that recent manager Rachael Lee be prevented from resuming a corrections health leadership role.

In February, 97% of nurses working in corrections passed



ONA nurses and supporters met outside the Multnomah Building in Portland April 25 to hand-deliver a letter to county commissioners calling for the removal of multiple members of the county health department's corrections management team following allegations of gross mismanagement. Photo Courtesy of ONA.

a vote of 'no confidence' in the health corrections administrators with ninety-five percent of nurses saying their working conditions have not improved over the last four years.

Nurses submitted additional evidence to county commissioners while also citing a National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Report released in January which

documented "serious healthcare and operational issues ... that do not comport with constitutional standards, accreditation standards, and professional practice standards" at Multnomah County corrections facilities.

The Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) represents more than 220 frontline healthcare professionals working in the Multnomah Coun-

ty Health Department including 65 nurses working in Multnomah County corrections facilities including the Multnomah County Detention Center, Inverness Jail and the Donald E. Long Juvenile Detention Home.

Nurses' advocacy comes on the heels of years of safety and staffing failures at Multnomah County jails including an unprecedented

number of deaths of individuals in custody and the resignation of many experienced doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers.

Facing a years-long staff shortage, county corrections nurses have been forced to work a record number of overtime shifts in recent years—leading to further burnout and resignations.

In 2022, nurses were forced to work 550 mandatory overtime shifts. In 2023, nurses were forced to work 563 mandatory overtime shifts and the problem shows no signs of stopping. As of April 22, 2024, nurses have been forced to work 168 mandatory overtime shifts this year—averaging nearly one and a half mandatory overtime mandates a day.

In addition to replacing failed health corrections administrators, nurses called for more frontline involvement in hiring decisions, a closer working relationship with the sheriff's office, assurance that nurses would not be retaliated against for speaking up and an increase in compensation to help recruit and retain new nurses. Currently, county corrections nurses make between \$5-7 an hour less than local hospital nurses and are thousands of dollars behind other facilities' standard hiring bonuses—making it extremely difficult to attract skilled healthcare workers.

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