

PRISON: Number of women inmates projected to drop by 8 percent in decade

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Filled as House Bill 3078, the act made three changes to curtail the number of women prisoners. The law expands the eligibility criteria for the Family Sentencing Alternative Pilot Program so more parents can participate.

The legislation also increases the limit for a supportive early-release program, known as short-term transitional leave, from 90 to 120 days.

Finally, it decreases sentences for first-degree theft and identity theft, from 18 months down to 13 months, while adding more community supervision. Lawmakers targeted those two crimes to reduce the number of women inmates. Women are statistically more likely to commit property crimes than violent crimes and are often driven by drug addiction.

"We know that addiction and mental illness are the primary contributors to many drug and property crimes," said Andy Ko, executive director of Partnership for Safety and Justice.

Investing in drug abuse treatment, mental health care and other supportive services that address the underlying drivers of crime is the best way to improve public safety, Ko said. "It has never made sense to warehouse this population in expensive prison cells that cause more harm by separating them from their children and communities," he said.

Tim Colahan, executive director of the Oregon District Attorneys Association, said the law changes need "to be judged by the impact on the rates of crime and recidivism."

"Safety should not be compromised for savings," he said.

Colahan, a former Harney County district attorney, said the state has long prioritized prison for the most violent criminals, and a small percentage of



EO file photo

Two members of an inmate work crew from the Two Rivers Correctional Institution, work Sept. 19, 2016, outside the secure perimeter of the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton. While the women's prison population is forecast to decline, the men's prison population is expected to grow slightly.

inmates are repeat property offenders.

"As a result, the population affected by the legislative changes in 2017 are virtually all high-risk individuals," he said.

The Oregon Corrections Population Forecast, projects the number of women inmates will drop by 8 percent between this year and September 2027.

Just a year ago, DOC requested money to open the second women's prison in Salem, because of chronic overcrowding at the state's only existing women's prison, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville. The Oct. 1 report puts plans for the second facility on indefinite

hold.

The semi-annual Oregon Corrections Population Forecast gives state economists' projections for the population supervised by the state Department of Corrections. The information helps that agency and the Criminal Justice Commission to plan budgets and prison beds.

The semi-annual report, released Oct. 1, projects an overall 1 percent decrease in the existing prison population over the next decade, even as the state's overall population is projected to grow by 12 percent. In contrast to women prisoners, the male prison population is still projected to grow slightly, by .7 percent in the next decade.

HERMISTON: Expected to open in March 2018

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won't affect the timeline.

The Harkenrider Center, located near the Hermiston Public Library and visible from Highway 395, is expected to open in March 2018. It is 7,000 square feet with a 4,000 square foot unfinished basement. The main floor includes a reception area, great room, fireplace, breakout rooms, offices, restrooms, commercial kitchen and elevator. The outdoors will feature a bus drop-off, parking, covered deck, landscaping and a path leading to Highway 395.

The former senior center was 5,000 square feet but was demolished recently when Hermiston School District took ownership of the former fairgrounds. Willard Fordice, the senior center's bus driver, said Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church was gracious in offering up its parish hall for senior meals in the interim, but the seniors are looking forward to having their own space again.

"Some of them can't believe it's that big," he said of a recent tour the seniors took. He said Hermiston Senior Center president Irene Miller, 96, was "tickled to death about it."

City councilors said they have had people asking about the project and asked that some sort of sign be added along Highway 395 across from the Holiday Inn Express so that people would know that was what was being built. "I'm excited," Mayor David Drotzmann said. "It looks nice."

On Monday during their regular meeting the council also approved a contract with the police union. The contract was supposed to be completed before July, but City Manager Byron Smith said a mediator was finally brought in on Sept. 26 to help finish negotiations.

The contract approved Monday provides for a 2.75 percent salary increase retroactively dated to July 1, 2017, another 2.75 percent



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

City councilors, staff and citizens take a tour of the Harkenrider Center on Monday in Hermiston.

increase on Jan. 1, 2018 and a 1 percent increase on July 1, 2018. It also gives a \$200 allowance for boots, increases bilingual pay from 2 percent to 3 percent, gives 5 percent assignment pay to officers promoted to a new corporal position and expands the definition of sick leave and bereavement leave to fit the one used by the city's non-union employees. Association members agreed to pay 2.5 percent of current health insurance premiums starting July 2018.

Smith said the contract was a little above what

the city had budgeted for, including 2.5 percent salary increases, but didn't have a total dollar amount off the top of his head.

Smith also reported to the city council that he had met with the owners of Ranch & Home, and they reported that problems getting electrical contractors had delayed progress on their new store on South Highway 395, and they would likely not open until February or March. The city had offered the company financial incentives for gaining their occupancy permit by Jan. 1.

PARKS: Says her worst deployment since joining the team was Hurricane Katrina

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1,000 people evacuated ahead of time from Hurricane Irma. Those evacuees were all classified as medically fragile, meaning they were in a wheelchair, on oxygen or had other special medical needs.

"They were isolated with no news as to whether their home was still there, or their family was OK," Parks said.

She said she was grateful the team includes a mental health professional, because it was a difficult time for many of the evacuees beyond just the physical discomfort of sleeping on a cot inside a school for weeks.

Irrigon nurse Kelly Sullivan and retired Pendleton paramedic James Thomas also deployed to Florida from Oregon. Usually National Disaster Medical System deployments are scheduled for two weeks at a time, but sometimes are extended to three or more, as was the case this time.

In some disasters Parks has been directly in the impact zone.

"During Sandy, the hospital was damaged so badly we were setting up

tents in the parking lots and people were coming through there instead," she said.

Parks said the worst of all her deployments since she joined the team in 2000 was Hurricane Katrina, which killed more than 1,800 people in total. After the initial devastation injuries continued to pile up as people had accidents wading through deep, debris-filled water or using chainsaws to try and clear through the wreckage.

"Hurricane Katrina was the most awful thing I've ever seen," she said.

The National Disaster Medical System is a federal program under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Personnel are trained to support communities with medical care and mortuary assistance as requested by state governments and are considered federal employees when in the field. The system is made up of more than 5,000 professionals organized into more than 70 teams around the country.

"Hurricane Irma put people's health and lives in jeopardy, and NDMS members are answering the call of duty to help residents

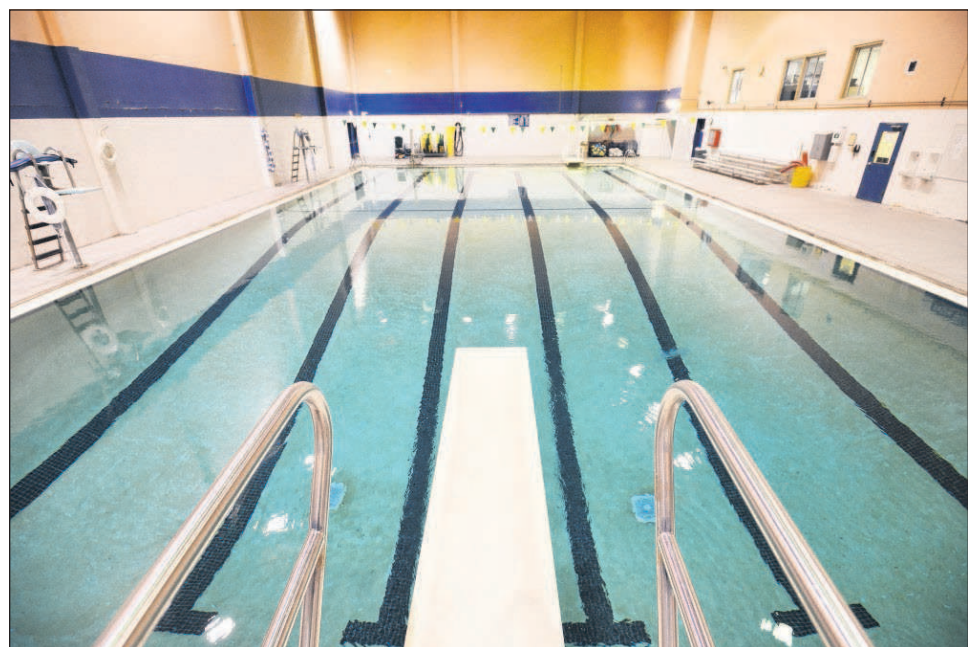
affected by this disaster," NDMS Acting Director Ron Miller said in a statement. "When a state requests our assistance, we will be there to serve until NDMS services are no longer needed."

To provide effective assistance, teams from each state participate in rigorous training each year designed to help them work together quickly in a variety of circumstances. Parks said one recent training involved practices setting up medical tents in the snow on Mt. Bachelor.

She said she signed up to work on an NDMS team because she likes helping people — the same reason she became a pharmacist. She may be getting recognition for responding to high-profile disasters, but she said just as important are the "unsung heroes" who cover her shifts at St. Anthony and take care of other things that allow her to leave home for weeks at a time on very short notice.

Other NDMS personnel continue to provide support for Hurricane Irma.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.



EO file photo

This 2016 file photo shows the pool inside of BMCC's McCrae Activity Center after the college made repairs and refilled the pool last October.

POOL: Pendleton Athletic Club considered too small

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In what may be the last year of this collaboration, BMCC gave Pendleton High School a discount, charging them a lesser rate than the \$5,850 a nonprofit or community organization would have been charged to use the pool for the same amount of time.

The board unanimously approved the agreement with little discussion.

For their part, neither high school wants 2017-2018 to be the last swim

season at the McCrae Activity Center

PHS Athletic Director Troy Jerome said he hoped BMCC would continue to approach renting out the pool on a year-by-year basis.

Aware that a new major maintenance issue to the pool could put it out of commission permanently, Jerome said options like the pool at the Roundup Athletic Club, which is considered too small, or the Pendleton Aquatic Center pool, which would

require some sort of cover to allow swimmers to use it during the fall and winter. But using the BMCC pool remains the swim team's top priority.

Hermiston's options are also limited.

Hermiston High School Athletic Director Larry Usher said the swim team has no Plan B if the college pool is closed after the season ends.

"Their indoor pool is way nicer than our indoor pool," he said. "Because we don't even have one."

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