

Caseworkers say staff shortages plague Oregon foster care

By SARAH ZIMMERMAN
Associated Press

SALEM — Dozens of case-workers rallied at the Oregon Capitol on Tuesday for full funding of Oregon’s foster care system, saying a severe staffing shortage has caused high burnout and turnover among current employees.

“Our current caseloads are more than double and sometimes approaching triple of what they should be,” said Rosanne Scott, a caseworker from Portland.

“This is way more work than one person can manage, and it means they’re not able to do all the things our kids need us to do for them,” she added.

The Department of Human Services, which oversees the state’s foster care system, has struggled for years to recruit and retain caseworkers, who work to find adequate foster homes for each of the 7,500 children in state care.

The Service Employee International Union Local 503, which represents public sector workers, said an additional \$80 million is needed to properly address problems in recruiting and retaining caseworkers.

And, although Gov. Kate Brown requested an additional \$14.5 million last summer to add nearly 200 workers, caseworkers say they need more funds to meet staffing needs.

In a February update to the governor, DHS said that it would



Melissa Unger, executive director of Oregon’s largest public sector union, speaks at a rally for foster care caseworkers outside the Oregon Capitol on Tuesday.

need to hire over a thousand child welfare workers and support staff in order to bring down worker caseload levels to the national average. The department is particularly struggling with a shortage of permanency workers, who are supposed to evaluate poten-

tial homes for children based on their individual needs.

According to the national standard, permanency workers should have a workload of 11 cases. The department found it had 36% of staffing levels needed to achieve that rate and would need an addi-

tional 900 full-time workers to bring individual caseload levels down.

“Our caseworkers are overwhelmed and are not able to engage with our children and families to understand their culture, assess their strengths and

find the root cause of why the family is struggling,” the report said.

The department’s also been slow to fill vacancies, and the most recent update to the governor shows that only 8% of 300 available positions have been filled. At least 220 people are currently in the hiring process, and 73 positions remain vacant.

Caseworkers say DHS needs to do more to retain the staff it already has, as high workloads and a lack of proper training have caused high turnover rates. A 2018 secretary of state audit found worker burnout caused a 23% turnover rate among staff in 2016, and caseworkers say that often people leave the profession within two years.

Scott, who has been a caseworker for 18 years, said recently the turnover rate has been the highest she’s ever experienced. She said she’s personally taken over the cases of 19 kids after their caseworkers left their jobs. That’s in addition to her current caseload.

She said it’s not only hard on the kids but also on the caseworkers themselves, who often feel demoralized and as though they can’t truly help children in need.

“It’s really sad to lose people who could contribute so much to the system because of a dangerously crushing workload that makes you feel like you’re totally inadequate and you can never be enough,” she said.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

TODAY

Sunny to partly cloudy

FRIDAY

Partly sunny

SATURDAY

Mostly sunny and pleasant

SUNDAY

Mostly sunny and pleasant

MONDAY

Delightful with clouds and sun

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST									
65°	40°	70°	44°	75°	49°	77°	47°	72°	50°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST									
71°	42°	76°	44°	80°	51°	83°	50°	80°	52°

OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

Forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather, Inc. ©2019

ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	65°	35°
Normals	67°	43°
Records	88° (1976)	24° (1905)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	0.00"
Normal month to date	0.03"
Year to date	7.76"
Last year to date	5.42"
Normal year to date	5.14"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	72°	31°
Normals	69°	42°
Records	89° (1947)	22° (1954)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	0.00"
Normal month to date	0.04"
Year to date	3.88"
Last year to date	4.05"
Normal year to date	4.03"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Fri.
Boardman	WSW 8-16	WSW 4-8
Pendleton	WSW 8-16	W 6-12

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	5:42 a.m.
Sunset tonight	8:03 p.m.
Moonrise today	5:09 a.m.
Moonset today	5:46 p.m.

New

First

Full

Last

May 4

May 11

May 18

May 26

Forecast calls for another busy wildfire season along West Coast

Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Most of the country can expect a normal wildfire season but residents along the West Coast of the United States should be ready for another busy season, the National Interagency Fire Center said Wednesday.

California experienced its deadliest and largest wildfires in the past two years, including a fire in the northern part of the state last year that destroyed the town of Paradise, killing more than 80 people. It was the nation’s worst death toll from a wildfire in a century.

The Boise, Idaho-based center said a heavy crop of grasses and fine fuels has developed across California and should elevate fire potential as it dries through the summer.

The terms “normal” or “above normal” refer to a formula that involves drought, precipitation and fuel conditions in each region, projected on a 10-year average, said Jennifer Smith of the fire center.

The Pacific Northwest has entered a period of moderate drought, which could mean an early fire season in the Cascade Range and the Okanogan region. The potential for significant

wildfires is above normal west of the Cascade crest in Washington and Oregon through August, the report said.

Some high-elevation portions of the Great Basin and the central Rocky Mountains could experience below-normal wildfire potential, the agency said. It also said that below average fire activity continued in April across the nation, thanks to moist conditions from the winter.

“Precipitation received was above average across the northwestern quarter of the nation and across a majority of the east,” the agency said.

Oregon man arrested in 1994 strangling death of Vancouver woman

VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP) — An Oregon man was arrested on suspicion of murder with sexual motivation in the death of a Vancouver woman found strangled in her bed nearly 25 years ago, after investigators linked him by DNA to the victim, authorities said Tuesday.

Richard Eugene Knapp was arrested near his home in Fairview, Oregon, and booked into Washington’s Clark County Jail, *The Columbian* reported. It wasn’t immediately known if he had a lawyer.

Audrey Hoellein, who was then 26, was found strangled at the Family Tree Apartments on July 17, 1994, where she lived with her 5-year-old son, according to newspaper archives.

Officers who responded to her apartment that night collected DNA evidence, which didn’t match any of their initial suspects at the time, according to a probable cause affidavit filed in Clark County Superior Court.

Persons of interests were compared against the DNA profile over the years without a match and a profile sent to a national database also did not return a hit, the affidavit said.

The DNA profile and the use of genealogy databases eventually led investigators to Knapp, who lived in Clark County around the time of the woman’s killing, Vancouver police said.

Knapp, now 57, had been

convicted of sexual assault in Clark County in 1986, and he strangled the victim in that case, according to the affidavit. He complied with an order then to provide a biological sample to authorities, but the sample was never uploaded to any database and was destroyed in 2000.

Law enforcement started surveilling Knapp at his home and place of employment in the past year in hopes of obtaining a discarded item to get his DNA for comparison, according to the affidavit. Authorities eventually obtained a cigarette butt belonging to Knapp and his DNA matched the original profile, Vancouver police said at a Tuesday news conference.

CORRECTION:
The May 1 article “Fire board incumbent launches write-in campaign after missing deadline” called Rob Tooley assistant fire chief for Umatilla’s fire district. He is retired from that position.
The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

EAST OREGONIAN

— Founded Oct. 16, 1875 —

211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton 541-276-2211
333 E. Main St., Hermiston 541-567-6211
Office hours: Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed major holidays

EastOregonian.com

To subscribe, call 1-800-522-0255
or go online to EastOregonian.com
and click on 'Subscribe'

East Oregonian (USPS 164-980) is published daily except Sunday,
Monday and postal holidays, by the EO Media Group, 211 S.E. Byers
Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801. Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, OR.
Postmaster: send address changes to
East Oregonian, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801.
Copyright © 2019, EO Media Group

Subscriber services:

For mail delivery, online access, vacation stops
or delivery concerns call 1-800-522-0255 ext. 1

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Local home delivery	Savings (cover price)
EZPay	\$13/month	60 percent
52 weeks	\$173.67	41 percent
26 weeks	\$91.86	38 percent
13 weeks	\$47.77	36 percent

*EZ Pay = one-year rate with a monthly credit
or debit card/check charge

Single copy price:
\$1.50 Tuesday through Saturday

Circulation Manager:
Bonny Tuller, 541-966-0828

ADVERTISING

Regional Publisher and Revenue Director:

• Christopher Rush
541-278-2669 • crush@eomediagroup.com

Advertising Services:

• Angela Treadwell
541-966-0827 • atreadwell@eastoregonian.com

• Grace Bubar
541-276-2214 • gbubar@eastoregonian.com

Multimedia Consultants:

• Jeanne Jewett
541-564-4531 • jjewett@eastoregonian.com

• Audra Workman
541-564-4538 • aworkman@eastoregonian.com

Business Office Coordinator

• Dayle Stinson
541-278-2670 • dstinson@eastoregonian.com

Classified & Legal Advertising

1-800-962-2819 or 541-278-2678
classifieds@eastoregonian.com or legal@eastoregonian.com

NEWS

• To submit news tips and press releases:
call 541-966-0818 or email news@eastoregonian.com

• To submit community events, calendar items and Your EO News:
email community@eastoregonian.com or call Tammy Malgesini
at 541-564-4539 or Renee Struthers at 541-966-0818.

• To submit engagements, weddings and anniversaries:
email rstuthers@eastoregonian.com or visit eastoregonian.com/community/announcements

• To submit sports or outdoors information or tips:
541-966-0838 • sports@eastoregonian.com

Business Office Manager:

541-966-0822

COMMERCIAL PRINTING

Production Manager: Mike Jensen
541-215-0824 • mjensen@eastoregonian.com