Cuts: State cuts to reduce recidivism raise local ire

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probation officer vacancy and a probation officer aide who would have provided cognitive treatment to offenders. The department also cut the job of a person who assessed inmates as they transitioned out of the county jail.

"I will be having conversations with our community partners to try to backfill some of that service," he said.

In Multnomah County, commissioners grappling with a more than $5 million reduction in state funds voted Thursday to ax a program that offered substance abuse treatment, job training and other services to criminal offenders with an eye toward reducing the likelihood they'll commit another crime. Nineteen positions were eliminated in all, and officials spent more than $900,000 in emergency funds to avoid immediately closing a 73-bed jail dorm.

In Clackamas County, the sheriff's office is warning of the possible closure next year of a program that serves hundreds of newly released prisoners a month, offering therapy, housing assistance, GED courses and more. Washington County leaders plan to close a 36-bed treatment program, fire three counselors and reduce money to help supervised offenders pay for housing. Marion County will eliminate a drug treatment program and won't fill more than seven vacant positions.

Primmer said the work of community corrections throughout Oregon has meant the state did not have to build a new prison in Junction City. Without adequate funding, county officials argue, they will be increasingly helpless to pursue the goals their community corrections programs are designed to achieve: lower rates of reoffending and a safer community overall.

The issue promises to command attention in next year's legislative session, when officials said they'll demand millions of dollars to keep their programs afloat. If they don't get it, they warn of increased prison usage, higher crime and more.

"It is completely devastating," Clackamas County Sheriff Craig Roberts said. "You're going to see a lot of doors come open and an increase in this homeless population that is already out of control."

Staff photo by Kathy Aney, File

Jeff Brown, parole/probation officer for the Umatilla County Justice Department, talks to his Day Management class in 2015 about strategies for dealing with frustration.

Primmer said a key Umatilla County program hangs in the balance of the February session.

Community Justice and the sheriff's office partnered up in 2016 to establish a detective who tracks down and arrests offenders who have absconded. Primmer said before the program, about 57% of the population his department issued warrants for came back with a new criminal charge. The most recent data, he said, showed that number was in the low 20s.

The total number of absconders and their subsequent arrests did not decrease, but the amount of crimes absconders committed did go down. That makes sense, he said, because having someone find absconders helps cuts down on escalating criminal behavior.

The funding issue has roots in two basic facets of Department of Corrections budgeting.

First, under an arrangement struck in 1995, most counties are awarded state funds in proportion to the percentage of felons (and certain misdemeanor offenders) they supervise statewide. State officials believe such cost-sharing is a great deal for taxpayers.

"Research shows this combined approach is consistent with evidence-based practices and significantly more cost-effective than relying on jails or prisons alone as a response to criminal behavior," according to a recent report from the Oregon Department of Corrections.

But larger counties have seen their percentage of statewide money decrease in recent years as their share of overall inmates has shrunk. Multnomah County, for instance, used to claim more than 20% of state funds, but this year the county received roughly 18% of state funding.

At the same time, lawmakers spent less money on community corrections this year than in the last budget — $268 million versus $273 million in 2017-19. That's because of an overall reduction in the number of people being supervised, a change that has roots in factors including less strict drug laws and charging decisions by prosecutors.

In Multnomah County, the reduction translated into $5.4 million less than the county received in the previous two-year budget. Clackamas and Washington counties also saw reductions of $1.36 million and $1.2 million, respectively.

That's how the system is supposed to work, said Jeremiah Stromberg, assistant director of community corrections at the Oregon Department of Corrections.

"Overall, the supervised population went from a high of 36,000 offenders to just above 30,000 today," he said. "As the criminal justice footprint becomes smaller, the funding formula is designed to follow suit."

To that point, counties raise another objection: The state's own data shows they're being paid far too little.

Under state law, the Department of Corrections is required to produce a study every six years to determine how much it actually costs counties to provide community corrections services. The latest study, conducted in 2018, concluded the state was underpaying nearly $51 million every two years for those services statewide.

County officials said they were confident lawmakers would make up the difference — some even budgeted with an eye toward at least part of the funding.

"There was an expectation that they might not fund all of it but they were going to fund some of it," said Jeston Black, government relations director for Multnomah County. "Leading up 24, 48 hours before the subcommittee voted on the budget, we were all being told things are going to be fine."

Instead, the DOC budget passed without any of the money being allocated. Many people attribute that to an event that roiled the Legislature this session: the illness and May 29 death of longtime state Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem.

Winters co-chaired the subcommittee that crafts the state's corrections budget and had carved out a reputation as an advocate for community corrections programs. But the senator was absent for a large part of the session as she received cancer treatment, and she was unable to shepherd through the budget as she normally would have.

"I believe Jackie Winters was taking this thing forward and things were moving in a positive direction and we were all calm, comfortable seeing that we would get the funding," said Roberts, the Clackamas County sheriff. "Sadly, she passed away."

Rep. Carla Piluso, a Democrat and former Gresham police chief who co-chaired the budget subcommittee with Winters, noted in a statement to OPB that data "showed a decline in the community corrections population and projected that it would continue declining." She did not address the study indicating that the state was underpaying for services.

Some lawmakers, however, did take notice. When the DOC budget passed out of the Legislature's main budget committee, Rep. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte, refused to support it.

"It's underfunded," said McLane, now a circuit court judge. "The community corrections funding is shockingly reduced. When I look at some of the other things we're doing here … I just don't know why we would allocate money at those priorities and underfund this."

His comments spurred a retort from Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, one of the committee's chairs, who said lobbyists had "misconstrued" the matter.

"They will say there is a $50 million reduction, which is patently false and inaccurate," Rayfield said. He contended the money in the budget was adequate to pay for current service levels.

Primmer does not see it that way. He told county commissioners the state's last fully funded cost study was in 2006.

"I would argue this is not a lack of information," he said. "This was a choice they made."

His choice comes down to stretching every available dollar to continue the work of supervising local offenders.

"Just because the funds aren't there," Primmer said, "doesn't mean I have fewer people to supervise in the county."

For its part, Gov. Kate Brown's office sounded a skeptical note about the decision not to fund counties at an amount the state acknowledges is correct.

Brown did not include any of the money in a proposed budget she released last year. And Kate Kondayen, a spokeswoman for Brown, said the governor was considering asking a third party to review the study that said the state is underpaying for community corrections by tens of millions of dollars.

Brown's office had previously issued a statement calling for "more transparency" in the money that counties spend and insisting corrections programs "be evidence-based and require measurement of outcomes." Kondayen, however, did not provide examples of areas where dollars weren't being spent transparently, or there wasn't adequate evidence for outcomes.

As with almost any program or priority that doesn't receive requested budget funds, it's not hard to find examples of people who could be impacted by cuts.

Corey Fuselier, 29, started using hard drugs in high school and in 2013 landed in an inpatient substance abuse program run by the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office. Fuselier said the program helped him identify the habits and tendencies that had led him to abuse heroin.

"Coming here kind of opened my eyes to the fact that it's not the drugs," he said. "It's the way that I think. And it's based around self-worth stuff and growing up not feeling like I belonged."

Fuselier graduated from the program, but again lapsed into drug use, racking up charges in Multnomah County for property crime, robbery and assault. Prison seemed a distinct possibility. Instead, he was accepted back into the Clackamas County treatment program, which Roberts said could lose staff and resources as a result of state budgeting.

Today Fuselier is on the verge of completing the program once again, and he believes he is on the path to recovery.

"I owe my life to this place," Fuselier said. "I was hurting a lot of people, and most of all I was hurting myself, and if I hadn't been given the chance to come here and also come back here I don't know where I would be today."

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East Oregonian reporter Phil Wright contributed to this report.

Round-Up: Getting ready for Pendleton to come alive

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crafts many of them herself.

"I work eight days a week," she said, laughing and pointing out that many vendors purchase and have their products shipped to them for events like Round-Up. "I have to go to my sewing machine. The factory is at home."

In 2016, the Woods came to Pendleton for the first time and experienced the week as visitors. While enjoying the atmosphere, they also staked out a spot they thought would be perfect for a booth of their own.

And then a year ago, the couple returned as vendors for a successful week of selling Sharon's work and making new friends in the area. As they fashioned this year's inventory around their booth on Friday to open for business on Saturday, Sharon said she's excited for the days to come.

"Once I'm prepared, it could go on for a month. I'm good," she said, smiling.

Julie Bennett is making her first appearance as a vendor at Round-Up and made the trip from Austin, Texas, earlier this month. Originally from Redmond, Bennett said she's spent the last month with her family in Bend.

Owner of Yipiokya, Bennett has been selling "upcycled and restyled" clothes that she restores from vintage cowboy shirts, patches and jackets for the last 27 years.

While she's sold at bigger rodeos like the Cheyenne Frontier Days, Bennett said her "funky" style lets her cross over into junk shows too.

After beginning her setup yesterday, Bennett got going by 6:30 a.m. on Friday so that she'll be ready to sell on Saturday too.

While preparations continue in the lot across from Roy Raley Park to open up on Saturday, the neighboring lot of the Speakeasy Salon and Spa will start its own in the coming days so it's ready to go for Tuesday of next week.

Katie Jones, who owns the salon and spa, said Portland's Traveling Taphouse will be setting up in the lot next week.

"It gets huge," she said.

The taphouse will have 24 beers on tap along with top shelf liquor. Though the lot will feature a large beer garden and a mechanical bull, Jones said the zone will be kid friendly as well.

But while the salon and spa itself are just a leisurely walk from Round-Up Stadium, it's also difficult to reap the benefits of thousands of visitors in the area.

"The problem is we're booked out like six months in advance," Jones said.

However, for a few special guests — such as the wives of the professional rodeo contestants that flock to Pendleton — Jones said they'll "squeeze them in" for quick appointments like curling their hair.

Located within the Speakeasy Salon, Sweet Irene's Coffee takes complete advantage of the increased foot traffic in the area.

"It is by far my best week of the entire year," owner and barista Heidi Thompson said.

Thompson has had her location for the past two and a half years and each Round-Up she said it's just gotten busier and busier. While it does disrupt some of her usual customers — Thompson said she closes down the drive-thru window during the week — she tries to accommodate them as best she can with a coffee bar outside the shop.

But as the week wears on, it just gets harder.

"On Friday this place turns upside down," she said, laughing.

Earlier this week, Thompson went through her inventory and realized she wasn't going to have enough product for Round-Up. With her coffee distributor based in Tennessee, she placed an overnight order just to be prepared.

In general, the surrounding areas of Round-Up Stadium provide plenty of excitement for the thousands of people ready to descend on the city next week.

"It's just a good, fun place to be," Jones said.

Problems: Recent suicidal incidents point to larger problems

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She also stated Lifeways is in the final stages of opening Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital, which will provide 16 beds for people facing mental health crises.

In 2014, the Blue Mountain Recovery Center, which had the capability to take in people with substance abuse issues — something Lifeways does not — shut its doors.

Matlack noted in Morrow County there are few places for those experiencing mental health crises to go, and the Recovery Center's closure exacerbated that.

He said the sheriff's office has two reserved beds at a clinic in John Day, but those often become filled by other patients when the clinic gets crowded. The sheriff's office sends people as far as Bend to get mental health treatment following a crisis.

"We have no place to take people in crisis," Matlack said. "The county jail has many, many people who are in jail for things they shouldn't be."

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said Eastern Oregon has seen a decline in the amount of local psychiatric beds. The number, he said, has shrunk from 1,600 in the early 1980s to fewer than 100 today.

Lawmakers in June set aside $1.6 million in state funding to make updates to the Umatilla County Jail, which Rowan advocated for. The funding is meant to make more single-cell holding space for people who might be at risk being around the general jail populace, including those with mental health issues. Those inmates now stay in the jail's recreation area.

Not everyone thinks the renovation will help relieve the lack of mental health services in the area. Roberts said he wants state funding to be put toward creating a drop-off facility, with a detox facility and mental health resources. Edmiston hopes for more early intervention resources.

"That's after they're already arrested. That's not solving the problem," he said. "There needs to be something on the front end."

Rowan said the renovation had been slated as a mental health remodel in the past, but that it isn't entirely the case.

"I do not believe that many of these individuals should even be in a jail setting. Our efforts here are to create at least a safer environment. At the end of the day, our local law enforcement doesn't have any other place for them," he said.

Edmiston, Roberts and Rowan all agree people with mental health issues are cycling in and out of custody, and there are not enough resources to make it stop.

"It's like taking somebody and putting them on a merry-go-round," Roberts said. "At some point, there is no jump-off."