

Consulting firm set to walk away from DHS contract

Alvarez & Marsal expected to clear \$3.5 million

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Consultants hired to lift Oregon's foster care system out of dysfunction were expected to close up shop Friday. All told, they are expected to walk away with \$3.5 million after eight months of work.

While about 60 foster children sent to facilities in other states have come back to Oregon as a result of the work of Alvarez & Marsal, a global consulting firm, the impact on the thousands of kids in Oregon's foster care system has yet to be widely felt.

State records show that in late October, the state

and Alvarez & Marsal agreed to increase the company's compensation to \$3.5 million.

The company was originally to be paid up to \$280,000 under its contract executed May 2, state records show. That figure steadily multiplied in the following months.

Initially, the contract was due to end Oct. 26. Contract extensions in May, August and October were reviewed by a state procurement official and the Oregon Department of Justice, according to Gov. Kate Brown's office.

Brown's April 18 executive order intervening at DHS allowed the state to suspend or change its policies on hiring and contracting to expedite those processes.

"The extensions were granted after (Alvarez & Marsal) demonstrated they were making progress in



EO Media Group file photo

Oregon Department of Human Services headquarters. Consultants hired to lift Oregon's foster care system out of dysfunction were expected to close up shop Friday.

meeting the objectives of the (executive order)," a spokesman for Brown, Charles Boyle, wrote in an email. "Progress was monitored in daily check-in calls with staff, weekly reports to the governor, monthly meetings

of the Child Welfare Oversight Board, and in legislative briefings."

Alvarez & Marsal are known for restructuring and business services, contracting with private companies and governments across the

country to fix problems and find efficiencies.

Brown brought on the consultants to overhaul the state Department of Human Services' child welfare system after a highly publicized controversy over officials' practice of sending foster kids to residential facilities in other states with little oversight.

Last week, Oregon Public Broadcasting published an investigation into the practice, finding that the state entrusted vulnerable kids to a private company, Sequel, that operates residential facilities. Children in those facilities have been hurt and abused, OPB reported.

Brown said the consultants would focus on internal operations of Oregon DHS to improve internal practices and procedures that would provide better treatment of Oregon foster kids.

The consultants told state officials in a briefing Tuesday that hurdles remain. That briefing, which lays out areas where DHS still has trouble and steps to fix those problems, was provided to the Oregon Capital Bureau by the governor's office.

The consultants said that Oregon's foster care program struggles with prioritizing and carrying out projects, and that it should set up clear "roles, responsibilities and measurable goals." DHS must work better with the state's health agency to meet kids' needs, they said.

They also recommended that the team that reviews deaths of children report directly to the director of the state child welfare program. Information from those reviews should be used to better train workers, consultants said.

Oregon Liquor Control Commission bans CBD-infused alcohols

By **KRISTIAN FODEN-VENCIL**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — The Oregon Liquor Control Commission passed a ban Thursday on manufacturing and selling alcohol that's been mixed with CBD, an inactive ingredient of cannabis, but one that has medicinal qualities.

The Growler Guys in South Portland has 40 different beers on tap, said Sue Wise. She orders them and said her customers aren't going to appreciate the OLCC ban on infusing alcohol with cannabidiol — the non-psychoactive ingredient in cannabis, often short-handed to CBD.

"People feel like the CBD in the beer is helpful, whether it's for muscle pain or other injuries they have. People really believe the

CBD helps them," said Wise. Customers still have options. The ban doesn't apply to drinks that aren't alcoholic and Growler Guys has four taps of CBD-infused soft drinks.

So, does Wise think customers will be OK getting their CBD from something other than alcohol?

"They may," she said. "But they still prefer the beer."

Up to now, Oregon has been relatively permissive in its approach to CBD consumption. In 2015, the state Legislature said hemp and marijuana could legally be added to foods.

Sunny Summers, the cannabis policy coordinator with the Oregon Department of Agriculture, said since then CBD's been added to all kinds of things.

"People are adding it to a

shot to coffee or smoothies for example. I've seen donuts that have it. Gummies. Gum ... I've seen sodas with CBD in it. Pretty much, if you can imagine it people are likely looking at it or have done it," said Summers.

Several Oregon brewers jumped on the CBD trend and introduced beers containing the cannabis chemical that people use for a range of medicinal purposes.

But alcohol is different from food and falls squarely under the purview of the Oregon Liquor Control Commission. The executive director, Steve Marks, said those beers are not technically legal.

"Both federal government and (the state) should be enforcing against that," said Marks.

To some degree, Marks is following in the footsteps



OPB Photo/Kristian Foden-Vencil

Sue Wise at Growler Guys in South Portland said customers will miss their CBD-infused beer.

of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In November, it said it doesn't consider CBD safe for use in food because research is so limited.

Marks said the OLCC's ban is needed for three main reasons. First, compa-

nies aren't sufficiently testing CBD to see how much is being mixed into drinks. Second, he's worried some of the psychoactive ingredients of marijuana are being included in products.

"And the third thing is CBD themselves, while

they're greatly purported for their health effects, there is a lot of concern about particularly the effect of high quantities of CBD on the liver, which is also affected by alcohol," said Marks.

Researchers at the University of Arkansas recently looked into the toxicity of CBD in mice and found an elevated risk of liver injury.

Over the last few years, all kinds of health claims have been made by those selling CBD-infused products — from lotions promising pain relief to tinctures for anxiety.

Last year, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the new drug Epidiolex, which uses CBD to treat childhood epilepsy.

Marks said for people who use CBD medicinally, they'll still be able to buy their creams and soft drinks.



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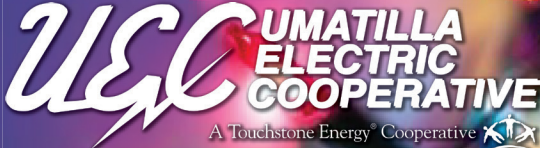
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