

Local & State

Brown creates oversight board for state's embattled foster care system

By Sarah Zimmerman
Associated Press

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown issued an executive order Thursday establishing an oversight board for Oregon's troubled foster care system, which has drawn heavy criticism and is the subject of a federal lawsuit alleging abuse and neglect of children in state care.

The governor is establishing a Child Welfare Oversight Board, a panel tasked with developing solutions to challenges within the foster care system. Brown said she will issue directives based on the Board's recommendations, and a crisis management team will ensure those changes are implemented.

She compared the crisis management team to a "SWAT team," saying it will act as her "eyes and ears" within the Department of Human Services, which oversees the state's child welfare system. One member of her executive staff will be embedded within the agency to make sure the governor's directives are carried out "as efficiently as possible."

"I think I'm taking unusual steps here because the challenging situations that we're seeing within the child welfare system," she told reporters Thursday.

In a statement, DHS said it welcomed the additional support of the governor and is already taking its own steps

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— Oregon Gov. Kate Brown



to reassess the way it delivers child care.

The move comes as DHS is facing a federal lawsuit over alleged mismanagement of its 7,500 foster children, particularly minorities and those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Lawyers say caseworkers are overburdened and that, out of a lack of proper placement options, children are sent to homeless shelters, refurbished jail cells, or out-of-state institutions. Brown said the executive order is not a direct response to the lawsuit, and that the plan has been in the works for months.

Marcia Lowry, who is the executive director of A Better Childhood, the national nonprofit behind the lawsuit, said she hopes the lawsuit will compel a federal court to force an overhaul of DHS. She called the governor's approach "not adequate."

"It's too little, too late," she said. "If her programs work out then good for her, but I don't think the children in this state are going to be protected without a court order."

Lowry said her team will be meeting with the state's lawyers next week, who have asked that Brown's name be

removed as a defendant in the case. That's not an option for Lowry, who said Brown needs to be held responsible as the head of state agencies.

"We know she has been involved with child welfare issues, she even campaigned on them," Lowry said.

When asked if she accepted responsibility for flaws in the agency, Brown told reporters "we all in this state bear responsibility for what is happening in our foster care system."

"These are all of our children," she added, saying that she wants to encourage more Oregonians to step up and offer foster kids a home.

Brown's advisory committees will make recommendations to address understaffing and a lack of placement options for foster youth. They will also advise Brown on the state's reliance on sending kids to out-of-state facilities, a practice that drew considerable criticism after a news report found a 9-year-old girl in a Montana for-profit institution was injected with Benadryl to control her behavior and went without visits from a caseworker for six months.

The state has more than doubled the number of kids

it sends out of state in recent years. Approximately 84 kids are currently in out-of-state facilities, compared to the 33 children sent to these institutions in 2017. Children spent between 5 and 33 months at these facilities, according to DHS data, and Oregon spent \$2.5 million for their care between October and December 2018.

A disproportionate number of these children shipped out of state are minorities. During a floor speech on Wednesday, Sen. Sara Gelser, a Democrat from Corvallis, said 14% of the children at these facilities are Native American, despite making up only 1.6% of kids in the state. At least 13% of those kids are black, even though African American children comprise 3.6% of the population.

Sen. Jackie Winters, a Republican from Salem, said those statistics show the "institutionalism of racism" in Oregon.

DHS is reassessing its use of out-of-state facilities, and is taking additional steps to address the needs of minorities in the foster care system. But Lowry said even if the state does bring those children back to Oregon, there still may not be an adequate place for them.

"Where are you going to put them — in jail cells?" she asked. "The children's needs here are urgent and have to be addressed as quickly as possible."

Harney County sheriff to resign at year's end

By Gillian Flaccus
Associated Press

PORTLAND — A small-town sheriff who gained national attention for his leadership during a 41-day standoff with armed occupiers at a wildlife refuge in Oregon is resigning, citing chronic underfunding for his department and concerns about liability caused by an outdated and understaffed jail.

Harney County Sheriff Dave Ward announced his decision to resign on Dec. 31, 2019, in an opinion piece published

Wednesday in the Burns Times-Herald. He said he was not willing to continue operating a jail "that is not funded to meet the minimum standards required" or to stand by while more staffers are laid off.

Ward was sheriff in 2016 when armed protesters angry about federal control of Western lands overtook the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in the remote county and stayed there for weeks. Ward became the face of local government authority.

In the letter, Ward says Harney County

faces a serious budget shortfall because of an accounting error — a deficit that he says has worsened the already woeful funding for the sheriff's department.

County workers already work 10 unpaid hours on furlough each month, he said, and the only way to address budget cuts to the sheriff's department would be layoffs.

The deficit in the general fund is more than \$800,000 in the next fiscal year, according to county budget documents cited by Oregon Public Broadcasting.

GARBAGE

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Baker Sanitary is also requesting an 18.75% increase for commercial customers with a single rollcart emptied weekly (from \$20 to \$23.75), the same percentage increase for landfill disposal, as well as increases for various commercial containers ranging from 16.59% to 18.55% depending on the size of the container and how frequently it's emptied.

Baker Sanitary has a franchise agreement with the city that gives the company the exclusive right to collect garbage within the city.

The agreement gives the City Council the authority to approve or reject rate increases by Baker Sanitary, with one exception — the company can boost rates by up to 5% each year without Council approval.

Councilors are slated to discuss the company's request

Tuesday, then consider an ordinance, with some level of rate increases, on May 14.

In a letter to the City Council, David Henry, Baker Sanitary's president, wrote that the company has been able to avoid raising rates since 2007 in part because of the additional money it received since 2006 when it started taking trash from Union County at Baker Sanitary's landfill near Sutton Creek a few miles southeast of Baker City.

That money helped Baker Sanitary "finance the necessary landfill liner, leachate pond and infrastructure that totaled over \$1.7 million in cost to keep our landfill open and continue to keep our local rates affordable," Henry wrote.

But he noted that three factors have prompted the company to request the City Council approve higher rates:

- "Recycling market deterioration"
- "Mainline equipment

replacement costs"

- "Landfill expansion needs"

Recycling

As is the case with many companies that also collect recyclable items, Baker Sanitary has been affected by China's decision, at the start of 2018, to severely reduce the amount of such material it accepts from the U.S.

In some cases, Henry wrote, China's decision (it was the largest importer of recyclables) has pushed prices for recyclable items to record lows. Baker Sanitary, which does not offer curbside recycling, no longer accepts mixed plastics and some types of paper at its recycling center at 12th and Campbell streets in Baker City.

Henry wrote that the company's recycling revenue has dropped by 50 percent compared to the average over the seven years prior to China's curtailment of

recycling imports.

"While recycling has never been a significantly profitable enterprise," Henry wrote, "in the past it would usually cover the costs of operating it. That is not the case anymore."

According to a profit and loss statement that Henry sent to the city, the company posted a net operating loss of \$58,000 on its recycling program from April 2018 through March 2019.

During the previous 12-month period, the ledger showed a net income gain of \$16,750.

Equipment replacement

Henry wrote in his letter to the City Council that because Baker Sanitary

has been concentrating on expanding its landfill, it has put off some equipment replacement, including two of its garbage trucks, which it replaced at a cost of \$600,000. The new trucks replaced vehicles that had been in use for more than 10 years, Henry wrote; the usual lifespan is 5 to 7 years.

The company has also installed a new recycling baler for \$117,000, replacing a 23-year-old mode, and rebuild its landfill compactor for \$317,000.

Landfill expansion

Henry wrote that Baker Sanitary will need to install a liner at a section of the landfill by the spring of 2020.

"We project the need to

expand the landfill by similar 5-8 acre sections approximately every 5 years at the estimated cost of \$600,000-\$800,000, current dollars, per section," he wrote.

In other business Tuesday, the City Council will:

- Review the annual financial audit for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2018.
- Have the second reading of a revised version of the ordinance governing the planting of trees on public rights-of-way.
- Hear an update from the Baker Family YMCA.
- Approve proclamations designating May 6-11 as Wildfire Awareness Week, and celebrating the 110th anniversary of the Carnegie Library on May 4.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Free workshop for teens set for Friday

A free workshop for sophomore, junior and senior students, "Who Are You? What Could You Do With Your Life?" is set for Friday, April 26 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at North Baker School, 2725 Seventh St.

The event is sponsored by Building Healthy Families.

"It's a great way for teens to learn more about themselves and to learn how to make smart decisions as they get ready to go out into the world," workshop leader Stacy Green, an Enterprise sales and marketing consultant, said in a press release.

The interactive workshop involves activities to help teens discover their personality type, their "unique selling feature," and uncover strengths, opportunities and challenges and how these can be addressed most effectively.

Other topics include: the five types of intelligence and how to make yourself smarter; who wants to be a millionaire?; common detours and mistakes and how to avoid them; how to set and achieve goals; and creating a mission statement for your life.

Participants must pre-register. For more information, call Elishah Thomas at Building Healthy Families in Baker City, 541-524-2331.

Baker Community Choir concerts May 3-5

Baker Community Choir will perform its spring concerts May 3, 4 and 5 at the Baker Heritage Museum, 2480 Grove St.

Performances are scheduled for 7 p.m. on Friday, May 3 and Sunday, May 4, and at 3 p.m. on Sunday May 5. The Baker Valley Children's Choir will join the Community Choir for the Friday and Saturday performances. Donations will be accepted at the door. Proceeds support the Children's Choir.

The Community Choir is directed by Hannah Violette. Marci Gerratt directs the Children's Choir.

The song selection celebrates home and country, including a medley from "The Music Man," a collection of John Denver hits, and patriotic songs such as "Pledge Allegiance" and "God Bless America."

OTEC offers bus rides to annual meeting

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative is offering free bus rides to its members who want to attend OTEC's annual meeting May 4 in John Day.

Signup sheets are available at the Baker County Senior Center, 2810 Cedar St. The bus will leave the Senior Center on May 4 at 8:15 a.m. Following the meeting, the buses will return, arriving at the Senior Center by 3:15 p.m.

The chartered bus can hold 47 passengers and has an onboard restrooms as well as storage for wheelchairs and walkers. However, riders will need to be able to climb the steps to reach their seat.

The annual meeting will be at the Grant County Fairgrounds, 411 N.W. Bridge St. in John Day. Doors open at 10 a.m. for members to register and browse informational booths. The business meeting will begin at 11 a.m. with an update from OTEC CEO Les Penning and Board President Austin Bingaman, followed by prize drawings and giveaways. There will also be live music provided by Generations and a catered lunch.

Youth play auditions today, Tuesday

Auditions for "The Three Prince Charmings," a youth production by Eastern Oregon Regional Theatre, are scheduled for 6 p.m. Monday and Tuesday, April 22 and 23, at the theater, 2101 Main St.

Director Lisa Ensworth is looking for three boys and three girls, plus four extras, for the cast. Actors need to be age 11 or older. The play runs May 30 to June 2.

Veterans Celebration Day

If you're a military veteran living in Baker County, Baker High School would like to invite you to our May 9th celebration.

You'll be honored by the faculty and students and have an opportunity to talk to individual students about the service you gave to our country. Lunch will be provided for all of our visiting veterans.

Please call 541-524-2608 for more information and to let us know you'll be attending.

Weekly Specials April 22-28

Monday	Meatloaf.....	\$8.95
Tuesday	All You Can Eat Spaghetti.....	\$8.95
Wednesday	Salisbury Steak.....	\$8.95
Thursday	Chicken Fried Steak.....	\$9.95
Friday	All You Can Eat Mini Shrimp.....	\$9.95
	Steak & Shrimp.....	\$10.95
	Pan Fried Oysters.....	\$10.50
	Prime Rib.....	\$14.95
Saturday	NY Steak.....	\$13.95
	Prime Rib.....	\$14.95
Sunday	Breaded Pork Loin.....	\$9.50/8.95 sr

OREGON TRAIL RESTAURANT

221 Bridge Street • 541-523-5844
Open Daily 6 AM - 8 PM

BUFFETS

Monday - Friday 11 AM - 2 PM
Lunch includes Salad Bar, Entree, Grilled Bread, Baked Bean & Vegetable

Sunday 8 AM - 11 AM
Sunday Buffet includes Chocolate Fountain

GHOST PEPPER COCONUT SHRIMP BURRITO

Our Ghost Pepper Coconut Shrimp Burrito is filled with crispy coconut shrimp, cabbage, green onions, homemade pineapple salsa fresca, and a spicy ghost pepper sauce all wrapped in a warm flour tortilla.

915 Campbell St, Baker City
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