

MENTAL HEALTH & SPORTS

YOUNG ATHLETES' HEALTH IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS' RETURN • B1

The Bulletin

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Deer Ridge Correctional Institution

Families fear COVID-19 is a death sentence for inmates



Laurie Howard, in her Beaverton home with her dog, Trigger, holds a letter from her brother, Ryan Monahan, an inmate at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras. Relatives of inmates say they feel shut out by Oregon corrections officials as the pandemic spreads in prisons.

Julie Keefe/photos for the Bulletin

Attorneys for inmates say Oregon prisons are dangerous

BY KYLE SPURR • The Bulletin

As COVID-19 cases spread last fall in Oregon's prisons, Laurie Howard feared for her brother, an inmate at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras. Howard, a 53-year-old elementary school teacher in Beaverton, stopped receiving regular phone calls from her brother, Ryan Monahan, around the time the Madras prison identified its first case of coronavirus on Nov. 13.

"I was afraid I was going to get some call that said your brother has died. I was terrified I wasn't going to be able to say goodbye or know what was going on."

— Laurie Howard, her brother is an inmate at Deer Ridge



Howard's concern grew as quickly as the virus in Deer Ridge. To date, 275 inmates have tested positive and four have died out of a population of about 675, according to the Oregon Health Authority. Statewide, 3,346 inmates have contracted the virus and 42 have died. Prison staff statewide have 795 confirmed cases, as of the latest data released Jan. 28.

The pandemic has left relatives of Oregon inmates feeling shut out. Families are not allowed to visit due to the virus and only hear about the worsening prison conditions through letters and occasional phone calls.

Like Howard, they hear about their loved ones being transferred to other prisons while sick with the virus and grouped together in close quarters with other inmates and

staff who are not wearing masks. They worry the conditions are a possible death sentence.

"I was afraid I was going to get some call that said your brother was died," Howard said recently. "I was terrified I wasn't going to be able to say goodbye or know what was going on."

Earlier this month, Howard received a letter from her brother. He said he had tested positive for the virus and had a 103-degree temperature, but he was still transferred in a bus, along with staff and other prisoners, to Snake River Correctional Institution in Ontario. After two weeks, he returned to Deer Ridge, wearing the same clothes and without personal medication that was lost in the move.

See **Inmates** / A8

Coronavirus across the globe

Why America is 'flying blind' to the mutations

BY WILLIAM WAN AND BEN GUARINO
The Washington Post

America has so little of the genetic sequencing needed to detect new variants of the coronavirus — like the ones first identified in Great Britain and South Africa — that

such mutations are likely proliferating quickly, undetected, experts said.

The lack of widespread genetic sequencing means the window is closing to find and slow the spread of variants such as the one first spotted in Britain, which appears to be

much more transmissible, and those initially detected in Brazil and South Africa. All have been discovered in small numbers in the United States.

Now is when genetic sequencing — a process that maps out the genetic code of the particular virus

that infected someone so it can be compared to others — would do the most good, while such variants are less prevalent in the U.S. population and action can be taken against them.

See **Mutations** / A7

CENTRAL OREGON AND STATEWIDE

Schools report lower dropout rates

Focus on struggling teens, COVID rules could have prompted drop, officials say

BY JACKSON HOGAN
The Bulletin

The percentage of high school students who dropped out of school plummeted last year, statewide and in Central Oregon's two largest school districts.

But was the reason for fewer dropouts solely the payoff of years of school district investments and strategies to help struggling students? Or did state mandates, issued after COVID-19 abruptly ended in-person learning in March 2020, deflate those numbers?

Some educators say it might be a little of both.

In the 2019-20 school year, Bend-La Pine Schools' dropout rate was 1.81%, and Redmond School District's dropout rate was 2.31%. For Bend-La Pine, that's the fourth straight year of declining dropouts. For Redmond, it's a big plunge after a few years hovering around a 4% dropout rate.

The statewide dropout rate in 2019-20 was 2.38% — the lowest ever recorded by the Oregon Department of Education.

In an online discussion with the media on Jan. 19, Jonathan Wiens — director of accountability and reporting for the state education department — noted that a new state mandate played a role in that record-low dropout rate.

After school closures in March, the state got rid of a rule that automatically listed a student as dropping out after not attending class for 10 days. A student would still drop out if school staff can't engage with them at all for the rest of the school year, but staff had more time to reach out.

See **Dropout** / A8

DESCHUTES COUNTY

Commission discusses goals for the next year

Increasing affordable housing, coordinating mental health resources considered

BY BRENNAN VISSER
The Bulletin

Increasing affordable housing, investing more in mitigating wildfires and coordinating mental health resources and law enforcement are some of the issues the Deschutes County Commission intends to address for the next fiscal year.

In a goal setting retreat held last week, each Deschutes County commissioner discussed priorities for the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

See **Goals** / A8

TODAY'S WEATHER



A chance of rain
High 49, Low 42
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The Bulletin
An Independent Newspaper

Vol. 119, No. 27, 30 pages, 4 sections



We use recycled newsprint



SNIP10