



Jessica Vega Pederson **Multnomah County Chair**

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To: Commissioner Sharon Meieran
Commissioner Susheela Jayapal
Commissioner Julia Brim-Edwards
Commissioner Lori Stegmann
Mayor Ted Wheeler
Commissioner Carmen Rubio
Commissioner Dan Ryan
Commissioner Rene Gonzalez
Commissioner Mingus Mapps
Metro Council President Lynn Peterson
Metro Councilor Ashton Simpson
Metro Councilor Christine Lewis
Metro Councilor Gerritt Rosenthal
Metro Councilor Juan Carlos González
Metro Councilor Mary Nolan
Metro Councilor Duncan Hwang

Dear Colleagues:

There is no greater issue affecting our community right now than the thousands of people living unhoused in Multnomah County – and I know our collective work to address the housing and homelessness crisis is a top priority for each of you and your offices. I am committed to keeping you in the loop around many key policies and initiatives that impact how we set priorities, collaborate and resource this crisis. At the heart of this update, the third since May, is my commitment to moving with greater urgency, transparency and accountability and to address challenges as opportunities to improve our continuum of care and collaborations.

I also write today just prior to the release of an audit of the Joint Office of Homeless Services conducted by Multnomah County Auditor Jennifer McGuirk. I want to take this opportunity to offer my appreciation and gratitude for her office's thorough and thoughtful approach to these complex issues and to the genuine opportunities this analysis gives us to build a stronger and

more effective response in several key areas of the Joint Office's work, especially the office's ongoing work to support and resource providers.

Providers are the key to progress.

We are committed to increasing communication and collaboration with providers and to building an on-ramp of support that will help organizations build the accountability, data and sustainable foundation that will support this work over time. A few recent milestones include:

- **Housing Placement:** Housing placement and retention solicitation closed July 31, with more than 20 organizations responding. These staff will continue outreach, housing placement and retention for those enrolled in Housing Multnomah Now and Oregon All In, regardless of location.
- **Wage Study:** Earlier this month, the Joint Office published a study analyzing the classification, compensation and benefits among employees of 20 homeless service providers contracted by the department. The study's findings clarified the challenging workforce conditions in the homeless services sector and support a tailored approach to improving workforce stability and equity responsive to each agency's needs. While we still must consider systemic solutions, investments in increased pay at the service level are an important feature of this year's budget, with an 8% COLA to human service contracts that builds on a total 7% COLA from last year.
- **Invoicing:** The Joint Office has recently completed a comprehensive examination of invoicing practices and identified areas to streamline and enhance efficiency in order to meet payment objectives. Currently 80% of invoices are paid at NET 10 (meaning that payment is delivered 10 days after the invoice is accepted), with goals for further improvement.
- **Convening:** Our first big table convening with 19 Joint Office providers on June 23rd was a very productive space. We are looking forward to holding our second quarterly gathering soon, tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, September 19th. We're also adding more providers to our Multi-Agency Coordinating (MAC) table to help share their strategic perspectives around this work.

Quarter Four of our Supportive Housing Services investments saw great improvement.

The Joint Office was able to significantly increase the amount of resources making a difference in the community in the final quarter of Fiscal Year 2023.

Overall in FY2023, despite the challenges we've been working together to address, Multnomah County exceeded last year's outcomes for housing placement goals while also exceeding last year's outcomes for moving people out of homelessness and back into housing (1,318 vs. 1,129).

Our community partners also provided eviction prevention assistance to 5,380 people in 2,067 households — far above our Supportive Housing Services Work Plan goal of 800 households.

At the end of year two of implementation, we are already 41% of the way to our 10-year goal of adding 2,350 permanent supportive housing units in Multnomah County.

Just in Q4, the Joint Office spent \$42 million — more money than in the previous three quarters combined (Q1: \$8.6 million, Q2: \$13.2 million, Q3: \$18.1 million = \$39.9 million). Metro is still reviewing our fourth-quarter SHS report, which goes into more detail about programming and spending, and will publish it online later this month. We will deliver a more comprehensive annual report on Supportive Housing Services outcomes to Metro this fall.

Moving people from the streets directly into housing is showing promise and expanding.

Housing Multnomah Now, the outreach-focused streets-to-housing pilot program serving people in Old Town/Chinatown, has been our laboratory for a new geolocation outreach tool developed in partnership with the Joint Office's Built for Zero team, and has resulted in over 150 assessments and 12 people with complex needs and housing barriers placed in housing. Concerted effort has also been put into our second location for this pilot, which is gearing up to launch in east Multnomah County, around the Sandy River Delta.

Tracking the data is happening, and working.

The Built for Zero team will soon expand the testing of the tool and pilot a new approach to Coordinated Access, our centralized housing and services system. This pilot will bring data collection, along with an entrapoint to housing and services, directly to people living unsheltered — including people who've never received traditional services.

This means, thanks to the investment of SHS funds, the Joint Office is improving how data is collected for and through our street outreach services. The significance of this step cannot be overstated; it has been a long-standing community request to improve this process for those people who interact only with outreach workers and aren't otherwise appearing in our services database. The pilot kicked off at the beginning of August and the provider will start to collect client-level data in October 2023.

Changes are continuing in management of the Joint Office.

The Joint Office's contract with Health Management Associates to conduct a coordinated evaluation of the department's operations, processes, and outcomes — in coordination with staff and community partners — will be finalized in early September and will result in a report and work plan to improve processes and increase efficiency and accountability. During this past quarter, the Joint Office hired a permanent Business and Operations Senior Manager to lead their finance team, increasing internal capacity and Joint Office collaborations. In the coming days,

we'll also announce the hiring of an experienced new Deputy Director who will further strengthen the JOHS executive leadership team.

Partnership at the regional level is strong and coordinated.

Our Corrective Action Plan, negotiated in detail with Metro, is targeted to spend down the approximately \$58 million in remaining funds the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners allocated for the 2022-23 fiscal year. Measures developed in this plan include investing nearly \$3.5 million in additional rent assistance, expanding the Clean Start employment program by \$1.5 million, an initial investment in the City of Portland's capital expenses for two additional TASS sites and investing in community-based organization capacity and organizational health through \$10 million of directed grants. We are reviewing service options with a provider to stand up services at the City's first-opened TASS site, located on the Central Eastside.

I want to be clear that a finalized plan with Metro doesn't remove the Board's authority and ability to approve all program offers in County budgets, which is how spending is authorized. The Board previously exercised its authority on \$40 million of estimated FY23 underspending (included in the CAP), as part of their vote on the FY24 budget. The Board will be able to exercise its authority on the remaining underspending included in the CAP. On August 3, my office emailed Commissioners and their Chiefs of Staff an informational packet that included a breakdown of CAP spending, delineating what was previously approved alongside new proposed expenditures that would need to be approved by the Board. The breakdown also included that the new proposed expenditures would require Board action.

Conversation on our board continues.

I was pleased to hold a work session with my colleagues on the Board of County Commissioners on Aug. 10, allowing for an open conversation about proposals for spending the approximately \$50 million in unanticipated revenue collected from the Supportive Housing Services Measure tax in 2022. This type of work session is something I advocated for as a Commissioner and was glad to put into practice as Chair. We'll continue the conversation to prioritize the use of this funding in a second public work session on Tuesday, Aug. 29, during our regularly scheduled Board Briefing.

Thank you for your leadership and continued collaboration in the challenging work of responding to the most urgent needs of our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Vega Pederson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessica Vega Pederson
Multnomah County Chair