

FROM: Annette Mattson, County Jail Inspection Committee Member

DATE: December 18, 2023

SUBJECT: 2023 MCSO Additional Inspection of County Jails

Purpose

In November of 2022, the voters of Multnomah County passed a county charter amendment requiring an annual jail inspection by the commissioners, along with selected volunteers. This is in addition to the annual inspection required that is performed by the commission, which does not require volunteers. The Ballot Measure Summary Statement further states that, “**Subject to reasonable measures to ensure safety and security, the sheriff would provide access for the county commissioner and volunteer to any part of inspected facilities any time without prior notice; for confidential interviews with consenting individuals; to records related to facilities. Volunteers would issue public reports with findings, recommendations.**”

Background and Process

I wish to qualify my report by stating that I am a normal, activist citizen. I have held elected office as an unpaid official for twenty-four years. My degree is in Human Development and my expertise is in public policy. Most of my public policy experience is in education and in utility management. I am also the alternate for Commissioner Brim-Edwards. I have no specific expertise in the judicial system. Based on my experience in applying for this task, I have the following recommendations for next year’s jail inspection:

1. Consult with an expert in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice and adjust the application forms and process for this committee. It contains obstacles for those who are not proficient in the English language. The charge of writing a report can also be off-putting for anyone whose first language is not English or anyone who has struggled with putting their thoughts into the written word.
2. Do a jail inspection – not a jail tour. The committee and others had a **tour** of selected parts of the jails. It was not an inspection. There were no records offered to those of us on the tour. MCSO staff and other county staff did not offer confidential interviews. This may be reflective of a flaw in the ballot measure itself – citizen volunteers participate but may not have knowledge of judicial reform, or the system of incarceration, jail facilities, or the jail budgets.

3. Make the “inspection” group smaller. Our group was not just four volunteers and some of the commissioners. There were numerous county staff members, too. It was an entourage. This was not conducive to real conversations or in-depth questions on areas of concern.
4. Devise a safe, random system for interviewing Adults in Custody (AICs). It is certainly a challenge to select AICs for interviews. The “model” AIC may be considered suspect by interviewers and the “challenging” AIC may be suspected as well. Nonetheless, some type of interview system should be developed. Our group was told specifically not to approach any AICs. Yet, the ballot measure explanation says that individuals are to be interviewed. It does not specify whether these individuals are staff or AICs. We only spoke to staff.
5. Supply relevant reports, memorandums, and other relevant documentation at least one week prior to the inspection, so the volunteer committee members have time to read the information and ask informed questions.

Equity and Inclusion

All the interaction and behavior that I witnessed was respectful and professional. The AIC population appeared to have a higher percentage of People of Color (POC) than the percentage of POC among staff. This is a common and unfortunate circumstance that is tied to historical oppression and discrimination. This will hopefully change due to the work of elected and community leaders such as Sheriff Morrissey O’Donnell, and an increased culture of justice in our community, state, and nation. The April 29, 2022, memo from the CBAC to the county commission, indicated excitement around growing Equity & Inclusion work in the agency.

The procedures for housing LGBTQ+ AICs seem adequate for their safety, as individual preference is a primary consideration.

Inspection Details

As stated earlier, my October 24th visit to the Multnomah County Justice Center and Inverness Jail was a tour and not an inspection. I will address the questions raised in the Inspection Detail section to the best of my knowledge and observations.

Facility Maintenance: Housing in both buildings appeared to be safe, clean, and minimalist. Some areas could use a fresh coat of paint and fresh flooring, as surfaces appeared worn with use and time. The outside recreation space at Inverness that I saw could use some cleaning due to what appeared to be moss or mildew on the walls. Exterior maintenance of both facilities was good. As someone with osteoarthritis, I cannot imagine sleeping adequately on a bed at Inverness. I hope some accommodations are made for AICs with bed

accommodation needs, as sleep is connected to good physical and mental health, as well as behavior.

Staffing: As with many law enforcement agencies, other government agencies and the private sector, there are vacancies. We were told that MCSO is working to fill the approximately thirty vacant positions. Hopefully, the people that fill these positions will reflect the demographics of our county.

Food: We toured the kitchen area at Inverness and were told the range of dietary options. We were also given some samples of the food served. All appeared to be in order. Again, hopefully fresh, and nutritious food is served as good nutrition affects mental and physical health, as well as behavior.

Education and Programming: We viewed a program being presented within a quad, which was related to drug treatment. We saw and interacted briefly with 3 AICs receiving educational opportunities through Multnomah County Education Service District. We were told about additional programs that were offered. As education and job training are a critical part of rehabilitation and reducing AIC recidivism. I hope that all AICs are encouraged and supported in participating in these programs.

Corrections Health: The group toured the medical clinic and housing at MCDC. At MCIJ we saw the mental health dorm, the treatment readiness room, and the mental health module. We did a walk-through of the clinic and spoke with medical staff. In addition, we were informed how AICs request medical and mental health help and supplied copies of the forms used. There has been media coverage regarding staff shortages and burn-out among health care providers in the county jails. It is important to be aware that the county health department, funded by the county commission, provides medical services at both jail facilities. Mental health providers are contractors.

Faith Practices: We observed three chaplains while on the tour. One was engaged with an AIC at MCDC and two were on break at MCIJ. The follow-up information given to me on the accommodation of religious practices was thorough and appears supportive for a variety of spiritual practices. We were told about paid and volunteer chaplain positions, and the committee was supplied with additional information on religious accommodations upon my request.

In Closing

My main concern outside of physical and mental health, as well as the safety of staff and AIC's, is the education and rehabilitation of those who are incarcerated, as an aid in reducing recidivism. Little information was received about the support on the "inside" to

help AICs be successful on the “outside.” The April 29, 2022, CBAC memo also discussed this in their budget feedback. Emphasize rehabilitation. Fund AIC programs that offer and encourage additional education, job training, drug treatment, and physical and mental health well-being for all AICs to reduce recidivism. It is less expensive to educate than it is to incarcerate.

The information received while on the tour regarding physical and mental health support for AICs indicated that the services supplied by the county are adequate. This contrasts with media reports earlier this year. It is surprising to me that the MCSO stated they do not independently track the use of Narcan in jails, and it seems that someone should be doing so.

Some members of the tour appeared disturbed that individuals who are being booked have the right by law to refuse medical care. This can be difficult to accept, but I support the honoring of individual medical freedom and choice.

It is important to honor the will of the voters, and this year’s structure for the inspection seems to fall short of the explanation and intent of the ballot measure. Again, the summary and explanatory statement in the SEL 185 form filed for the request of ballot title, states a different type of “inspection’ than that which was conducted. It is important that this process be revised prior to the next time the event takes place.

It was an honor to be selected for this committee. I appreciate the opportunity and hope that my observations and comments are used constructively.