

Correctional Facilities Community Inspection Report

On Friday, November 14, I participated in a Correctional Facilities Community Inspection alongside County Commissioners and community members. The inspection included visits to both the Multnomah County Detention Center (MCDC), also known as the Multnomah County Justice Center, and the Multnomah County Inverness Jail (MCIJ).

Multnomah County Justice Center (MCDC)

Built in 1983, the Multnomah County Detention Center is a joint City and County facility that houses law enforcement, court operations, and jail functions. It serves as the initial booking location for all county arrestees and operates as a 448-bed maximum-security facility for county Adults in Custody (AICs), as well as state and federal prisoners.

Our tour followed the standard intake process, beginning with booking, holding, and processing. During intake, individuals pass through a body scanner to detect contraband before being issued facility clothing, including pink t-shirts and scrubs. We also toured the kitchen and housing units.

The first housing areas observed were closed-cell, maximum-security units designated for individuals with high mental health needs or those classified as security threats. Access to out-of-cell time (“walk time”) is determined by security classification, with individuals grouped by similar risk levels. Mental health needs alone do not determine threat level or out-of-cell restrictions, though they do influence housing placement.

Staff explained that some individuals voluntarily self-isolate due to discomfort around others; these individuals are provided the maximum walk time staffing allows. In contrast, individuals identified as high security threats due to behavioral issues—such as assaults on staff or other AICs—may be placed in isolation. Disciplinary restrictions range from as little as 15 minutes of walk time per day to one hour out of the cell (23-hour lockdown). As behavior improves and threat levels decrease, additional out-of-cell time is granted.

We also observed a designated observation hall for individuals with acute mental health needs. This area was highly controlled and clinical in nature.

The remaining housing units reflected a more standard jail design, featuring large, concrete, baseball-diamond-shaped layouts that allow staff unobstructed views from elevated observation points, commonly referred to as “crow’s nests.” Two tiers of cells line the perimeter walls, with secured railings on the upper walkway to prevent falls or injuries.

Common areas included a television, bookshelf, and telephones mounted on a concrete post. Individual cells were small, each containing a single bed, a stainless steel combination toilet and sink, a window, and a small writing surface.

It is important to note that the Justice Center functions primarily as a transitory facility. Most individuals are transferred to the Multnomah County Inverness Jail to serve short sentences (under one year) or await trial. Exceptions include high-profile individuals, those with significant security concerns, or individuals who cannot safely function in a general population setting. Additionally, the Justice Center serves as the sole intake and release point; individuals housed at Inverness must return to the Justice Center for final release processing.

Multnomah County Inverness Jail (MCIJ)

Our second inspection stop was the Multnomah County Inverness Jail, located in Northeast Portland. Built in 1990 and expanded in 1997, this medium-security facility has a capacity of 1,037 beds.

Upon arrival, we sampled the lunch provided to AICs. Drawing from lived experience within county jail systems, where food quality has often been a serious concern, I was notably impressed. Facility staff shared that these improvements were implemented following recommendations from a previous inspection. The updated menu costs only eight cents more per meal than the prior version, yet has significantly improved food quality.

Following lunch, staff provided an overview of the facility's history, available services, clinical care, and the specialized mental health dorm. We then toured the health services ward and multiple housing units.

The first dorm we visited was vacant, allowing for a thorough inspection of the layout. Housing units at Inverness feature an open-concept design that provides clear sightlines for staff. Amenities included private showers, video visitation booths, telephones, television viewing areas, and library shelving. The dorm also offered exercise stations with pull-up bars and decline benches, along with access to an outdoor recreation yard open to the sky.

AICs are assigned individual sleeping areas and have access to tables for socialization and recreational activities such as games. While hygiene facilities offer some privacy, overall personal privacy within the dorm environment is limited.