

Multnomah County Auditor's Office

2025 Annual Report

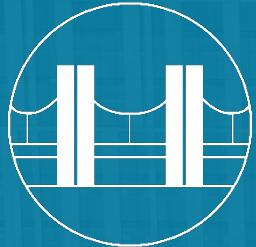


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Message from the Multnomah County Auditor

Dear community members,

One thing you might not know about me is that I am a huge fan of science fiction generally, and of Ursula K. Le Guin and Octavia E. Butler in particular. I have always wondered how those visionaries could imagine a future (albeit, not always a happy one) while living through perilous times. I think they had to have hope – hope that there *would* be a future for humanity.

I mention this because, for many people I know and for me at times, the federal rhetoric and actions in 2025 made it difficult to have hope. It is hard to hope that we will create a more just society when all around us is evidence that at the federal level, unaccountable people are in charge. It is hard to hope when ICE agents act with impunity, when federal assistance to help people access food is cut, when human rights are threatened consistently. What has kept me going has been you.

Seeing people in our county help each other in ways large and small has kept me hopeful. The people of Multnomah County have shown up for each other - from participating in peaceful protests to supporting organizations that help people meet basic needs through your work, volunteerism, and donations.

It has been such an honor for my team and I to show up for you through audits, case work, and investigations conducted according to rigorous, fact-based, ethical standards. I urge you to keep showing up for each other. Let's keep giving each other hope. My office will be there with you in person at events, and in spirit as we promote an accountable, equitable county government.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your County Auditor,



Jennifer



**Promoting
accountable, equitable
county government**

Promoting accountable, equitable county government

Government should be transparent with and accountable to the people it serves. We recognize that accountability without equity can reinforce inequitable systems, and that equity without a strong focus on accountability can lead to empty promises.

Performance audits, the Good Government Hotline, and the Ombudsperson are each essential to having an accountable, equitable county government.

About performance audits

Our performance audits provide trustworthy information that people can use to understand their county government at a systems level and advocate for its improvement. Audit reports provide an independent, impartial assessment of the performance of government operations and financial affairs. Through our audits, we find out how well the county government is working, recommend improvements, and report to the public on our work. We also follow up on audit recommendations to support county government's accountability.

About the Good Government Hotline

The Good Government Hotline provides county employees and community members with a way to confidentially report suspected fraud, inefficiency, waste, and abuse of position in county government. Organizations with hotlines detect fraud more quickly and have losses that are about half that of organizations without hotlines. All of our hotline investigations are the result of tips from people who made a report to the hotline. While not every allegation made to the hotline results in a public report, our office investigates all complaints of suspected fraud, inefficiency, waste, or abuse of position in county government. The hotline is a critical function for ensuring that county government resources are used efficiently and ethically, and that the government is transparent and accountable.

About the County Ombudsperson

The County Ombudsperson is an impartial resource who helps people resolve issues with county programs. By listening to people's complaints, the Ombudsperson strives to help the individual and the county program find a path to resolution. The ombudsperson can conduct independent, impartial investigations into the county's administrative actions and recommend changes. Often, the Ombudsperson can resolve issues through phone calls or other informal means. Most matters people report to the Ombudsperson do not result in public reports. Benefits of the Ombudsperson's work are felt by the individuals we help, and also contribute to system improvements.

Commonalities across these functions

Each of these functions uses technical and soft skills to serve the county. We analyze laws, data, interview themes, and strategic plans, for example. As we synthesize this information, we do so through a framework of trauma-informed practices, an equity lens that leads with race, active listening, and other soft skills. Often, we provide service one-on-one to community members - either through work with the Ombudsperson, through interviews for the hotline and audits, or through general inquiries that we receive to our office email and phone.

Additional annual reports

In addition to the information in this report, we publish separate hotline and ombudsperson annual reports focused on statistics about the kinds of issues reported to these services. We also publish a report summarizing the status of audit recommendations we have assessed during the prior year. These reports can be found on our website: www.multco.us/auditor-mcguirk.



Community engagement

Community engagement recap

Community engagement is a core function of the Multnomah County Auditor's Office. Our approach begins with inviting the community to become more familiar with our office's functions and to connect them to our resources. The integrity and quality of our work is often tied to how well we listen and learn from community members, frontline staff, and service providers. We strive to engage with diverse community members from a position of cultural humility and respect, which helps my staff and I understand community needs and concerns related to county government.

We center our community engagement efforts on learning about the experiences of those most impacted by county programs to ensure we are focusing our audit and investigative resources appropriately. We also share with community members what we have learned and provide them with information they can use to help keep the county government accountable.

We make these connections in many different ways – in one-on-one conversations, group meetings, and participation in community events. The next time you see our Multnomah County Auditor table at a farmers market or cultural event, please stop by and say hi!

We participated in 30 community events

Here are some of the places where we connected with community members in 2025:

- Arab American Heritage Month event, hosted by Multnomah County Employees of Color Resource Group
- Frybread Fest, hosted by Downtown Portland Clean & Safe in partnership with the Portland Indigenous Marketplace
- Portland Samoan Festival, hosted by Samoa Pacific Development Corporation
- Rosewood Saturday Celebration, hosted by The Rosewood Initiative
- Portland Chinatown Museum Lunar New Year Parade and Celebration, hosted by Oregon Historical Society and numerous community partners

- Burmese/Cambodian/Lao/Thai New Year in the Park Festival New Year, hosted by New Year in the Park/ Cambodian American Community of Oregon
- Arab Mahrajan, hosted by Arab American Cultural Center of Oregon
- Democracy in Action, hosted by Central Catholic High School
- Good in the Hood Multicultural Festival, hosted by Good in the Hood (GITH)
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Tribute: Keep Alive the Dream, Beyond Resilience to Empowerment, hosted by World Arts Foundation
- Asian American, Pacific Island, and Native Hawaiian (AAPINH) Month event, hosted by Multnomah County Employees of Color Resource Group
- AANHPI Leadership Summit 2025: Honoring Our Heritage, Navigating Change, hosted by Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization and (IRCO) and Philippine American Chamber of Commerce of Oregon (PACCO)
- American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 88 Labor Day Picnic
- Armenian Genocide Remembrance, hosted by Multnomah County Immigrants and Refugees Employee Resource Group
- Black History Month: 450 Years of Oregon's Black History, hosted by Oregon Black Pioneers
- Black Journeys: Exploring Oregon's Black History, The Legacy of Racial Injustice and Paths Forward, hosted by Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI)
- Friday Forum with Portland City Auditor Simone Rede, hosted by City Club of Portland
- Indigenous, Race, and Ethnic Studies (IRES) Careers and Mentorship Panel, hosted by University of Oregon
- It Takes a Village: Conversations with Leaders on Housing and Homelessness, hosted by City Club of Portland
- Joint Professional Resource Group Summer Gathering, hosted by Partners in Diversity
- Joint Professional Resource Group: End of Year Celebration, hosted by Partners in Diversity
- Juneteenth 2025: Love is Our Power, hosted by Multnomah County Employees of Color Resource Group
- Lent's International Farmers Market, hosted by Portland Farmers Market

- NAYA's Reimagining Justice Mural Block Party, in NE Portland's Cully neighborhood
- Portland Learn Share Do Fair: Building connections for a more climate resilient community, at Centennial High School
- Portland Learn Share Do Fair: Building connections for a more climate resilient community, at Floyd Light Middle School
- Portland Pride Parade, hosted by Pride Northwest, Inc.
- Rocky Butte Farmers Market
- Say Hey! Quarterly, hosted by Partners in Diversity
- The Community for Positive Aging

We would love to connect with you! Send an email to mult.auditor@multco.us to invite Auditor McGuirk or a member of our office to your community meeting or event. Or call us at 503-988-3320.

We continued to work with outstanding volunteers

In 2025, we were fortunate to work with a variety of volunteers who contributed their time, knowledge, and abilities to serve the county and its communities.

The **Auditor's Community Advisory Committee** provides input on the audit schedule, community engagement, and diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. The committee meets with Auditor McGuirk every other month, which is a tremendous gift of time and knowledge to the county. The 2025 Auditor's Advisory Committee members were:

- Alyria Cox
- Rex Dominguez
- Becky Graham
- John Karabaic
- Darius Mani Yaw
- Diane Odeh

Our office also supports the **County Commissioners' Audit Committee**, which is a liaison to the Board, the external auditor, and management for required external financial audits. In 2025, the Audit Committee's community members were:

- Shani Harris-Bagwell, Chair
- Cesar Lujan
- John Parker, Vice Chair
- Andre Tyson
- Jerry Walker (outgoing member)
- Annick Yagapen

We hosted a great intern

In 2025, we hosted College to County participant Gigi Bareilles, who served as our Good Government Hotline Community Engagement Intern. She shared with us that she believes accountability and transparent communication are crucial to doing quality work in any organization and are especially important to building trust in government, which is why she decided to intern with the Auditor's Office.

Gigi helped us better connect with employees and community members about the hotline. She developed new outreach strategies for us, and helped organize presentations about the hotline to staff throughout the county. Below is a zine Gigi designed for community awareness about the hotline.





2025 report recaps

2025 report recaps

Every audit, special study, recommendation assessment, and investigatory report we publish is a tool that you can use to understand county government and advocate for its improvement.

Audit reports

[Preschool for All: The program is largely achieving its equity goals, but needs to address risks to expansion](#)

We issued this report in April about Preschool for All's performance. The county has stated that the program intends to prioritize children in Multnomah County who have had the least access to quality, affordable preschool. As a result, children who are in families with low incomes, are homeless, are in foster care, speak a language other than English, and/or have disabilities or developmental delays get a priority in the application process. We found that the majority of children who apply and enroll in the program have at least one priority.

We also found that Preschool for All's growth depends on getting existing preschools to participate. Many preschool providers in the county had chosen not to apply to the program. We made 16 recommendations focused on improving communication and transparency, providing additional supports, getting feedback from preschool providers, both participating and not, and monitoring and adjusting processes for capacity growth.

[Countywide Equity Audit: Multnomah County shows commitment to equity; more accountability is crucial for ensuring meaningful progress](#)

This report, which we published in July, provided a deep dive into practices in every county department and also looked at countywide issues. We found that there were statistically significant differences in outcomes for employees based on their demographic groups. Countywide, Asian employees were less likely to be supervisors, Black or African American employees were less likely to pass the trial service period and were more likely to be fired, and LGBTQIA2S+ employees were more likely to quit.

Audit work included conducting interviews and focus groups, analyzing multiple years of human resources data to assess employee outcomes, and analyzing each county department in relationship to a recognized equity maturity model. The audit report included recommendations for each department, as well as 16 recommendations for the entire county ranging from improving county work environments and manager accountability to enhancing support for employees with disabilities.

[Department of Community Justice: Jail sanctions are worsening inequities and outcomes](#)

Also in July, we issued this audit report about the experiences of adults on probation and parole. We found that sanctions from 2019 to 2024 were mostly from technical violations, such as failure to report to a meeting with a probation and parole officer. Since 2019, average technical jail sanctions days nearly doubled in length. Black and Native American people were disproportionately sanctioned to jail.

The department's mission includes providing resources, which is important because of the population served. But we found that the number of referrals to resources like housing and mental health services were inadequate to meet needs, and culturally responsive resources were limited. We made 23 recommendations focused on addressing disparities in sanctions and racial equity; improving access to resources and referrals, including for those with mental illness; and creating a more consistent grievance process.

[Multnomah County responsiveness to phone and email inquiries from public](#)

We conducted this audit after the County Ombudsperson received complaints from people who were unable to reach anyone when they called county phone numbers. Our office focused on identifying any barriers to communication, such as technical or language issues, and evaluating the accuracy of the contact information provided. We used five mobile phones with numbers that did not have the standard Multnomah County prefix and created email accounts using aliases to prevent receiving preferential treatment as county employees.

Countywide, offices picked up the phone or returned our calls 80% of the time and

responded to 87% of emails. When we got a prerecorded phone message, 59% contained options for one or more languages other than English. Three of the phone numbers listed on the county website did not work. We issued our report in October and made four recommendations to support better responsiveness to the public, as well as improved language access.

Recommendation status reports

We follow up on audit recommendations to support the county government's accountability. You can help ensure recommendations result in real change by encouraging your county elected officials to maintain a focus on implementing audit recommendations.

[Recommendation Status Evaluation: The Joint Office of Homeless Services has implemented one of the 2023 audit recommendations, while others are in process or not implemented](#)

We issued this assessment in February, noting that the Joint Office, now called the Homeless Services Department, had implemented one recommendation from the 2023 audit, was in the process of implementing five recommendations, and had not implemented the following recommendations:

- The Joint Office executive management needs to communicate their strategic vision to providers and staff.
- Program Specialists/Program Specialist Seniors have a conflict of interest in being both the primary advocate for homeless service providers and also the ones who hold them accountable for meeting performance measures. Joint Office management should modify the Program Specialist role so that this conflict of interest is eliminated.

[Recommendation Status Evaluation: The county has implemented three of the pandemic funds audit recommendations, but found the other two not practical to implement](#)

We issued this report in March. While the recommendations we assessed were related to pandemic-specific funding, the principles of the findings still applied generally to controls around county spending. The county had implemented three of our

recommendations. While the county did not implement the other two, we determined that there are other processes and controls in place that management planned to implement or that management had enhanced since the audit to help mitigate the issues identified.

[Recommendation Status Evaluation: The Library has implemented most of the audit recommendations, but employee concerns remain an issue](#)

In June, we released this evaluation focused on recommendations from our 2023 audit of the Library. We considered the Library to have implemented seven recommendations, found four recommendations to be in process, and the following recommendation had not been implemented:

- Champion safety committees as a place to address security issues.

Library leadership shared with us that they do not see the safety committees as a place to address security issues.

As part of the evaluation, we conducted an all-library staff survey. Employees expressed continued dissatisfaction with the progress made on recommendations. We found that there appeared to be a significant disconnect between management's actions and what staff have told us they are experiencing.

[Recommendation Status Evaluation: Animal Services - Full compliance with pre-adoption spay and neuter efforts is still in process](#)

In this evaluation that we released in September, we found that Animal Services was still in the process of implementing the recommendation we expected to be completed by March 2025. This recommendation was for Animal Services to spay and neuter all eligible animals prior to adoption.

We considered this recommendation as in process because Animal Services had increased pre-adoption spay and neuters, and was working to address current staffing challenges and build capacity to meet pre-adoption spay and neuter demand. We said that Animal Services needs to address these issues as quickly as possible to ensure they are spaying and neutering 100% of eligible animals prior to adoption.

Special study reports

[2024 Ethical Culture Survey: Employees said they feel the rules don't apply to everyone equally, worry about retaliation for speaking up, and need more guidance on how to report unethical behavior](#)

This was the fourth ethical culture survey that the Auditor's Office had conducted since 2016. We repeat the survey every two years to identify trends in how employees view the county's ethical culture. We received responses from 3,173 employees, about 46% of the county workforce, and we issued the report on the survey results in March.

We found that employees generally believe the county had clearly communicated ethical expectations to them. However, only 1 in 3 employees responded that they feel the rules at the county apply to everyone equally. Employees also worried about retaliation for speaking up, with less than half of employees who responded to the survey saying that they felt they could report unethical behavior without fearing retaliation. We also found that in response to many of the survey questions we asked, there were statistically significant differences in the way that employees experienced the ethical culture depending on race and ethnicity, gender, and transgender identification. We urge management to use this report to learn about employees' perceptions of the ethical culture, and to use the findings to take steps toward improvement.

[Learning from our past: A brief history of the Multnomah County Auditor's Office](#)

In December, we concluded part of a multi-year project on the history of the Multnomah County Auditor's Office with the publication of this article in our professional association's regular publication, the Association of Local Government Auditors Quarterly.

The article provides a great overview of our office's history, how performance auditing continues to evolve, and how we can draw on the past to keep moving toward accountability and justice.

Hotline reports

Waste: The county overpaid for executive recruiting services by over \$78,000, due to deviating from contract terms and failing to identify overbilling

During the course of investigating a tip to the hotline, we analyzed 40 county executive or staffing recruitments that occurred between July 1, 2020 and October 17, 2024. This analysis included reviewing 24 county contracts for executive recruitment or staffing recruitment services. The total expense of the 40 recruitments was about \$1.6 million.

We substantiated waste, and issued this report in May. We noted that the county overpaid for services by over \$78,000. These overpayments occurred for two primary reasons:

- The county permitted a contractor to charge a higher rate than provided by the payment terms in the contract.
- The county did not properly reconcile submitted invoices to contract terms.

As a result of the investigation, we made three recommendations to reinforce contracting and invoice approval requirements that county management has agreed to implement.

Waste: Inadequate oversight means the county cannot verify recycling rates on four major construction projects

This investigation took place after the Auditor's Office received a tip to the Good Government Hotline alleging that inaccurate reporting of construction waste recycling was occurring on library construction projects. We issued our investigatory report in October.

The investigation focused on major construction projects to renovate and expand the Albina, Midland, and North Portland libraries, and to rebuild the Holgate Library. City of Portland code and county policy require construction projects to recycle 75% of construction waste. LEED green building standard certification points for construction waste are gained for recycling at 50% and 75% thresholds. We determined that some construction waste recycling data the county relied upon was inaccurate and unreliable, and could not be used toward the calculation of overall construction waste recycling rates for the projects.

Based on the investigation, only the Albina project achieved at least a 75% recycling rate, complied with City of Portland code and county policy, and will be eligible for two LEED certification points. The Midland project achieved at least a 50% recycling rate and is eligible for one LEED certification point. The other two projects met none of the recycling requirements. We recommended that the county implement policies and procedures to ensure contractors and subcontractors are aware of and comply with recycling standards and provide accurate recycling data.

Photo credits

Report photos by Motoya Nakamura, Multnomah County Communications Office, except for photos on the Community Engagement title page taken by Auditor's Office staff.



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