



Jessica Vega Pederson Multnomah County Chair

April 25, 2024

Multnomah County Executive Budget Message

This FY 2025 budget is the first one I've had the privilege to steward from start to finish – to work on with joy, a commitment to a community-oriented process, and a genuine desire to invest in policies and programs that meet the biggest needs for the most people. It is an offering to our community and a reflection of where we're coming from, where we are and where we're going. In delving into this year's work, I knew we had opportunities to strengthen our connections with each other through this process and make thoughtful and sometimes tough decisions in a year with fewer resources.

The County budget is a blueprint that outlines and articulates priorities for our work, our investments, and our way forward on the issues that concern and challenge us. The County's budget is a moral document and considered the clearest expression of our priorities. I am the leader of the largest county and manage the third largest budget in Oregon. It is important to me that I am clear about my values and how the decisions reflected here will impact our safety net, services, and community.

This year, I've invested in several areas to ensure we're addressing the biggest challenges our community faces. Multnomah County is responsible for some of the most critical, complicated services to neighbors who are experiencing the worst days of their lives. We provide shelter for people who are homeless, work around the clock to support people during severe weather, and connect with folks in severe mental health or substance abuse crises. We lift our community up with libraries, in-home nursing, and in providing access to joyful, culturally-responsive early-childhood education.

Our region faces hardships and economic challenges, and our revenue projections forecast a budget deficit in Fiscal Year 2025. Like so many cities and counties, we cannot continue all of the County's current programming and I have asked each department to constrain their General Fund spending by 3% as a result.

I have been clear: departments must keep Multnomah County's values in mind as they navigate these hard decisions. We must make fiscally sound choices that will help us maintain and grow successful programs that create and advance equity and justice, strengthen the health, safety and stability in the lives of community members and engage the community actively in this work.

The complex challenges we face today demand strong and bold leadership. This \$3.96 billion Executive Budget represents hard choices and tough trade-offs designed to continue support for our most critical priorities: Focus and clarity in programs that are foundational to a healthy safety net, a one-county approach across all programs and especially our homelessness response system, addressing the fentanyl crisis with increased and diversified interventions and treatment options, a healthy library system and network of animal services, adjustments to our elections to respond to a changing elections landscape and a strong Multnomah County ready to tackle the tough problems of today and tomorrow.

Our past four budgets featured multimillion-dollar investments in the County's COVID-19 response and appropriated the federal dollars we received through the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the 2021 American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act. This year, those federal pandemic support dollars are no longer available.

This Executive Budget includes:

- A 24% increase in the dollars allocated for housing placements, rental assistance and support services for people experiencing homelessness
- \$9.5 million in strategies to provide safety on and off the streets
- A new investment of \$900,000 of Supportive Housing Services (SHS) funding for homelessness response specifically in East County
- \$29 million dollar deflection and addiction recovery package that includes a \$2 million new County General fund dollars to coordinate implementation of HB 4002 in our community
- A continued investment of \$9.3 million for daily operations at the Behavioral Health Resource Center, including support for the Day Center and Shelter program
- \$1.4 million in one-time-only dollars for Elections Division to continue to conduct and protect our fair, safe, and free elections
- \$876,000 in partnership with the City of Portland in one-time-only funding for the District Attorney's successful retail theft and auto theft task-forces
- Full funding for our jails, adult parole and probation and specialty courts
- \$1.3 million for a Newcomer Support Services Pilot to augment short-term humanitarian transition services for asylum-seekers

- A 3.3% General Fund cost of living increase (COLA) for all Health and Human Services contracts to continue increasing the baseline wages needed to do this meaningful work

We know our challenges are many: Economic and social recovery from the pandemic, reckoning with centuries of racial and social injustice, wrestling with the continued impacts of homelessness and a systemic lack of affordable housing, community violence, complex behavioral health, mental health, and addiction, climate change, and economic inequality.

But we can address these challenges together by living our values as a community. You will see my values, and our values, in this budget, including:

- Advancing equity and justice
- Bringing all the partners to the table to deepen collaboration, accountability, transparency, and trust
- Making sure the community's voice is heard throughout this process
- Providing the best safety net for the people living among us who need it most

This budget tackles the biggest, most complex problems facing our community and reflects prudent steward of our taxpayer dollars. I know that the work the County can carry out by executing this budget will be transformative for our community.

I am profoundly grateful for the depth of partnership reflected here. Thank you to people across Multnomah County who have engaged with this process. Thank you to the dozens of community-based organizations who have shared their priorities and who walk alongside us in this work every day. Thank you to leadership and staff at each department for living your values in considering how your programs and core work can be focused on equity, justice and community needs. Last and definitely not least, thank you to the Board of County Commissioners for your partnership and leadership in challenging times as we work together to build on the opportunities before us to meet them. Thank you.

Sincerely,
JVP

Housing, Shelter and Our Homelessness Response System

There is no bigger or tougher problem right now than making sure thousands of our community members have a pathway off the streets and into housing. An effective homelessness response that maps our entire community's efforts is the number one priority of my administration.

This work is not just about shelter or housing, it's about the lives of the people living among us. We all want to live in a community where everybody has a safe place to call home.

Together with state and regional partners, we're solving our housing crisis by creating accessible, safe and efficient shelters that diminish the need for shelter over time, improving data, increasing connections and street-level outreach to those in need, investing in rent assistance to prevent more neighbors and families from losing their homes and providing services that increase resilience and the ability for many of our most vulnerable residents to recover and find stability.

The programs in my Executive Budget reflect a significant investment of \$285 million, a 24% year over year increase for housing placements, rent assistance and support services designed to meet those experiencing homelessness where they are - on the streets, in vehicles, in shelter beds – and assist them to successfully move into permanent housing and help them stay there. This includes \$9.5 million general fund dollars in strategies to provide safety on and off the streets, including alternative shelter, motel-based shelter and vital outreach workers on the ground every day.

Homelessness Response Action Plan (HRAP)

The disjointed nature of these efforts spread across various jurisdictions, bureaucratic agencies, and systems have not worked effectively. Our Homelessness Response Action Plan (HRAP) is a different approach to this work. The HRAP aims to develop governance and accountability structures that coordinate communication, increase transparency and progress, and provide a single point of reporting for accurate dashboards and data. The plan includes clear goals and policy objectives, cross-jurisdictional workgroups to break down silos and improve outcomes across the homeless services continuum, better transparency and accountability through coordinated communication. Every system must be at the table – behavioral health, public health, housing developers, first responders, community justice and the Joint Office of Homeless Services.

Upstream interventions to prevent homelessness are often less ineffective when we don't know the biggest risk factors for entering homelessness, or consider those as we develop solutions. With our new HRAP, we will apply evidence-based, culturally responsive, holistic interventions that consider the unique needs of each high-risk population.

We are focused on these groups: communities of color, individuals exiting foster care or leaving incarceration, people 55 and older, those who identify as LGBTQIA2S+, folks exiting inpatient medical and behavioral health facilities, people with an underlying substance use disorder or mental health condition, or individuals with other disabling conditions who are experiencing a gap in income as a result of divorce, loss of job, or an increase in rent, medical, or other basic need expense.

The HRAP has thoughtful, specific, and achievable goals for the next two years:

- House or shelter 2,700 more people
- Add 1,000 beds of shelter capacity (an increase of 39%)
- Increase the number of adults leaving shelter for permanent housing by 15%
- Making sure 75% of people placed in permanent supportive housing are still there 24 months after placement
- Increase the supply of affordable housing through regulatory changes, building conversations and new construction funding

All of this requires significant one-time funding in the FY 2025 budget focused on preserving shelter beds and shortening the time people spend in shelter. This budget includes \$12 million dollars to help people move out of shelter and into housing, \$1.8 million to help people find the shelter and treatment they need and get the resources they need while they're there and \$13 million to increase beds for shelter during emergencies.

Data and Accountability

Last year we invested more than \$330,000 dollars toward sustained work with the Built for Zero Initiative. This has given us the most accurate count of people experiencing homelessness in our county. We must continue to invest in robust data management systems, expand our Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) regionally, and add capacity for reporting and coordination among jurisdictions.

Shelter and Stability

Our Supportive Housing Services (SHS) dollars must support the most vulnerable on our streets. Nothing is more important. As a baseline, we are not letting a single shelter bed close, including back-filling any funding gaps to ensure stability and growth in this area. This work also helps us create strong, efficient and geographically diverse shelter and stability for everyone who needs it regardless of their zip code or needs. This Executive Budget directs \$127 million to investments to aid safety on and off the street, including population-specific and trauma-informed congregate shelters, motel shelter rooms and alternative shelters.

Multnomah County is committed to funding and operating long-term, high-quality, year-round emergency shelters, and to providing seasonal temporary shelter during cold weather months. In order to do this, my Executive Budget includes \$18.5 million of additional one-time-only General Funds that will be used to build out our emergency shelter infrastructure.

This capital fund will help us acquire and renovate available properties quickly and to bring new shelters online to meet the goal of increasing our shelter beds over the next two years by 1,000 beds. This includes capital investments in day shelters in parts of Multnomah County that have historically been under-resourced, allowing us to provide shelter on and off the streets at a broader range of times and locations. The Joint Office is using an equity lens to lead the transformation of all year-round shelters into a network of community-based shelter programs that are located, designed, and supported with the wraparound services we need to help folks transition into permanent housing.

Stability also means keeping people housed and stable before they become homeless – especially those priority populations who have historically been most impacted by housing instability. We’ve transitioned \$3.7 million dollars of formerly ARP funded emergency rental assistance to become a part of the county General Fund investment. This ongoing funding will continue our progress addressing the gaps in service for BIPOC and other marginalized and hard to reach communities.

Strong, Coordinated Partnerships

This work is about people. We know the people we’re serving will be supported more and in a more sustainable way if our partnerships in this work are strong.

The Supportive Housing Services (SHS) Measure continues to give the Joint Office and the homelessness response system financial, programmatic, and policy opportunities. These opportunities strengthen community and multi-jurisdictional relationships around a common vision in addressing the homelessness crisis. We’re making the most of this coordinated approach at the state, regional, city, and provider levels to make sure investments will have the most significant and effective impact on the chronic homelessness that too many of our neighbors are experiencing.

Our investments partnering with East County jurisdictions are critically important for the growth and stability of shelter programs, day centers, and street outreach programs. My 2025 budget invests \$600K dollars to expand staffing and rent assistance dollars to increase outreach, case management, and housing placement within the City of Gresham’s Homeless Services Team.

An additional \$300K dollars will be used to expand outreach and rental assistance programs focused on the East Multnomah County cities of Fairview, Wood Village and Troutdale. This funding will support programming to house and retain housing.

Following a one county approach, we are making cross-departmental investments of Supportive Housing Services funding to ensure that we are more nimble and build capacity and increase collaboration across the many connections the County shares with our community in our work to address homelessness and housing instability. These include deep investments through the Joint Office into a wider array of county divisions – including Department of County Human Services' Aging, Disability and Veterans Services Division, the Multnomah Stability Initiative, behavioral health crisis services in the Health Department, partnership with Emergency Management to coordinate emergency shelter during severe weather and housing assessment and referral services in the Department of Community Justice.

Public, Behavioral and Community Health

As Oregon's largest safety net provider, we help Multnomah County residents access support to be healthy. The landscape continues to shift: we are wrapping up a tri-governmental 90-Day Fentanyl Emergency Response and a short legislative session yielding significant new policy changes and investments. We've taken a hard look at what we need to successfully offer services across our behavioral health continuum of care, implement health initiatives through partnerships, better integrate public and behavioral health needs into our homelessness response system and adapt to the ongoing fentanyl crisis.

Resourcing our Response to the Fentanyl Crisis

Every one of us knows someone who has struggled with substance abuse challenges. And the profound increase in fentanyl distribution, use and overdose across the nation makes this reality even more common and harmful. We know access to health care and treatment services makes recovery possible. Decades of underinvestment in treatment services throughout Oregon have left many families without support or viable options. Oregon has one of the worst rates of access to mental health care for young people, and one of the highest rates of mental illness.

In February, Multnomah County joined the City of Portland and State of Oregon to declare a 90-day emergency to address the fentanyl crisis. Complex issues like this require those from different jurisdictions and areas of expertise to come together to communicate, coordinate, pilot new ways of approaching the work and develop stronger and more sustainable policy efforts.

Over the past several months, this unified work has galvanized existing partnerships and forged new ones, illuminated gaps and opportunities for improved coordination, and provided us with a clear picture of the practices, investments and approaches we must prioritize as we move beyond our initial declaration of emergency. Multnomah County will continue to center the perspectives of community members with lived experience, and take a one-county approach to investments in prevention, harm reduction, treatment and ongoing recovery support.

This executive budget looks at next steps in addressing this crisis from many angles. Building on the Health Department's [2024 Overdose Prevention and Response Plan](#) and learning stemming from the 90-day emergency response, this budget maintains \$5.5 million in harm reduction programs and invests an additional \$2.1 million in public health approaches. Key new investments include:

- An additional \$438,000 in youth prevention support
- Increased harm reduction services including an \$800,000 expansion of direct street outreach with the addition of another full team
- \$425,000 in additional resources for Naloxone coordination, distribution and training
- \$440,000 for data modernization to improve real-time surveillance of overdose and drug supply trends

Deflection, Stabilization and Recovery

We know communities with access to adequate health care and prevention are more likely to recover and thrive. The County is focused on expanding treatment services that will make it possible for people to heal from substance use disorders. Like the rest of the state, our community has long suffered without enough treatment options or a fully built continuum of care to meet those with substance use disorder where and when they are ready to move towards health and stability. This budget combines investments from the State of Oregon, the City of Portland and Multnomah County into a \$29 million dollar deflection and recovery package that will help us build toward more fully meeting the needs in our community.

The passage of House Bill 4002 during the short legislative session provides Multnomah County with significant responsibility and opportunity as it recriminalizes the possession and use of drugs and provides pathways for repair outside of the justice system. Our responsibility is to ensure that people struggling with addiction are not unnecessarily ensnared in the criminal legal system, and that existing inequities are not further entrenched through over-policing communities of color and inadequate culturally-specific treatment options.

Our opportunity is to create deflection programs that are effective, accessible, and informed by the wisdom of people with lived experience. “Deflection” refers to interventions that occur before an arrest or as an alternative to criminal justice system involvement, providing a pathway to behavioral health services rather than criminalizing addiction. Deflection is sometimes used interchangeably with “diversion,” though diversion generally refers to post-arrest interventions.

This budget dedicates \$2 million of new, ongoing General Fund dollars to effectively coordinate implementation of HB 4002 across Multnomah County Departments and externally with a broad range of community partners. We will use State of Oregon and City of Portland dollars to launch a 24/7 deflection center with assessment and stabilization services and community-based deflection programs that connect people with treatment options. Further, our ongoing work developing a drop-off sobering center will complement and add critical capacity to the continuum of behavioral health care. We know the need in our community for acute and immediate substance use services is clear and urgent and these sobering services will bring together a broad coalition of stakeholders to create new opportunities to impact this crisis and make our streets safer.

These new resources build on investments our Board has dedicated to implementing recommendations stemming from Behavioral Health Emergency Coordination Network strategies, including \$8.9 million – an increase of over \$3 million in SHS dollars – to fund critical short-term shelter, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing capacity for individuals living with complex behavioral health needs. This budget continues investments that support motel-based emergency shelter capacity and crisis case management for individuals in the Health Department’s Choice program and investments in long-term rental assistance and recovery housing for people served by Multnomah County’s Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Intensive Case Management (ICM) teams.

All of these investments are designed to build toward a full continuum of services for people living with behavioral health challenges. These include finding longer-term safety and housing stability and support when in crisis, detox or withdrawal. This includes a range of treatment, housing and long-term recovery support. And throughout this continuum, as part of a commitment to equity and serving those most vulnerable, leadership will identify, develop, and support services that are culturally and linguistically responsive or specific, ideally facilitated by individuals whose lived experience is reflective of the population being served.

Behavioral Health Leadership

Continuing to build an accessible, coordinated, culturally responsive system of behavioral health care is one of my top priorities for Multnomah County. From crisis response to long-term recovery support, the needs in our community are immense, and this budget funds capacity across the entire behavioral health care continuum.

This budget also makes a critical new investment in the staffing infrastructure of our Health Department: A new behavioral health systems strategist who will serve as part of the Behavioral Health leadership team in collaboration with the Behavioral Health Division Director to focus on the significant need and expanding scope of work in behavioral health. As we work to meet this moment – continuing to address the fentanyl crisis, successfully implementing deflection programs, and maintaining our broad array of services and roles – bolstering our hiring for people with specific knowledge and talent will help manage this expanding work and strengthen our partnerships.

Behavioral Health Resource Center (BHRC)

The vision for the Behavioral Health Resource Center (BHRC) is to create connections and relationships between dedicated peers and those seeking services. The BHRC is a welcoming, peer-led peer-driven space for some of the most marginalized members of our community. It is a place to meet most basic needs – not just for food, clothing and tangible resources but for connections, trust and dignity. The BHRC continues to evolve as a reliable resource and a hub for new approaches.

Our investment in the BHRC includes both on-going and one-time-only funds totaling \$5.5 million for the Day Center operations and \$3.9 million in funding for the BHRC shelter program. This past year marked major milestones as we celebrated our first full year of operations. Our Day Center provides an accessible entry point for people experiencing trauma, behavioral health challenges and, often, homelessness. Open 12 hours per day, the Center serves 100-150 participants daily with access to showers, bathrooms, laundry, clothing, computers, charging stations and calming spaces to rest and build relationships.

In Spring 2023, we opened 52 beds with supportive services in the Behavioral Health Shelter and Bridge Housing programs. These programs will help individuals move toward stable and permanent housing. Early results are promising: 382 people have been served to date, and more than half have had a positive exit to housing, treatment, or another step toward recovery.

In a collaborative effort to increase community safety, address local business community concerns, our access model includes a van stationed that provides basic needs and hot coffee while participants wait for their staggered windows entry into the BHRC. This innovation reflects our commitment to continuous improvement as a good neighbor.

Supporting Family, Youth and Community Health

Supporting and expanding services for youth and families is a top priority in this budget, which maintains stable investments in school-based mental health services, culturally-specific community health programs, pregnancy and parenting support, and more. We know that valuing the health and stability of young people and their family systems has profound intergenerational impacts, and this budget makes investments that equip youth and their families with the tools to thrive.

Babies and parents, especially from communities that have the most challenging health disparities – particularly for Black, American Indian and Alaska Natives communities – deserve to be served in settings that are culturally reflective and developed in partnership with families. Parent, Child, and Family Health (PCFH) programs within the Public Health Division connect with individuals around pregnancy and early childhood to improve health outcomes and reduce racial and ethnic disparities in perinatal and birth outcomes, with an ultimate goal of eliminating inequities and creating foundations that improve the health and wellbeing of future generations.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of one of these programs, Nurse Family Partnership (NFP). NFP is an evidence-based nurse home visiting model that supports first-time, low-income pregnant people from early pregnancy through their child's second birthday. NFP improves lives, from prenatal health, fewer childhood injuries, increased intervals between births, increased maternal employment, and improved school readiness for children. Despite strong outcomes, the sustainability of NFP's funding model – which requires a significant local general fund match – is a question we must examine closely and thoughtfully. This budget invests nearly \$3 million to maintain funding for NFP, as PCFH explores possible restructuring of home visiting programs with the ultimate goals of improved access to care, increased community engagement, and the development of a financially sustainable model for expansion. The Legislature recently approved limited statewide funding for the local match to support NFP programs. My budget will allow PCFH to maximize this new funding support while exploring the potential of additional services that may serve more families.

Given the disproportionate impacts of housing instability, addiction, and health disparities on Native populations, the restoration of funding for the Future Generations Collaborative (FGC) – the first and only Native American and Alaska Native program funded by the Multnomah County Public Health – is of great consequence. FGC is successful in reducing inequities and reinforcing the strength and resilience of Native communities through education, engagement, and evaluation. Funding stability preserves a Community Health Worker position, as well as staffing support to ensure that FGC has the mechanisms to monitor and track outputs and outcomes. FGC will provide this programming on-site at Barbie’s Village, a Native-specific transitional housing tiny village that centers Indigenous values.

Improvements in the Emergency Medical Services System

My priority is that our community is safe and healthy, and that quality emergency medical services are available to everyone who needs them, when they need them. Since before I became Chair, Multnomah County’s Emergency Medical Services (EMS) system has faced challenges. During the pandemic ambulance staff, firefighters, and other first responders endured incredibly difficult conditions, showing up through uncertainty and risk to continue delivering life-saving care in our community. Our long-standing history in Multnomah County of good clinical outcomes is due to the strong standards we’ve set, and the first responders who deliver care within that system.

Over the past two years, we have seen a decline in the consistency and reliability of emergency ambulances in our community. Multnomah County has worked collaboratively with our contracted ambulance service provider to support improvements, but also hold them accountable for the services our community expects. We’ve asked them to implement approaches to better manage low-acuity calls and keep emergency ambulances available for life-threatening emergencies, subcontract and partner with other agencies, and focus on staff retention to avoid additional staff loss. This work will continue, *and* it is clear that it is time for us to reassess our EMS system as a whole.

This budget includes \$756,768 of one-time-only funding to conduct a full assessment of our Ambulance Service Plan (ASP), the policy document that outlines key features of Multnomah County’s EMS system. In February of this year, the Board approved funding to begin this work, and this additional investment will support the significant analysis, stakeholder engagement, and thoughtful examination that is necessary to identify the strengths and challenges of our current system, explore possible system wide changes, and produce recommendations to build a County EMS system that is best able to provide efficient and effective services into the future.

Innovation and Modernization

Our teams do great work – and they are always looking to improve on our excellent services and be a leader in our region. I want Multnomah County to continue to be an employer of choice and for our employees to feel supported in their work. Here are the many ways we're investing in innovation and progress this year.

County Management & Equity

Multnomah County's ability to advance equity in our community is deeply rooted in our ability to build and maintain equitable systems inside our organization.

Our Workforce Equity Strategic Plan is the foundation for equity work in the areas of promotion and professional development, employee retention, recruitment, and workforce development. By investing in all avenues of the employee experience, we can attract, cultivate and retain a dynamic and diverse workforce to best serve the needs of Multnomah County communities. This executive budget continues last year's investment in a renewed WESP, which was completed this spring, by adding capacity to the WESP's research and evaluation work through the establishment of a data consortium, as well as enhancing staff capacity in the Office of Diversity and Equity to lead culturally specific trainings in tribal knowledge so we can better connect and provide services to the urban Native community.

Moving us to a one-county approach, which is focused on reducing silos throughout all of the work of our departments and programs, requires leadership. Which is why this year I've prioritized work on restructuring the office of Multnomah County's Chief Operating Officer (COO) to provide better strategic oversight and alignment across this critical management. In 2023, the County partnered with a consultant to assess the role, duties, and organizational structure of the Office of the COO. They highlighted the COO team's limited capacity to lead countywide strategic planning and goal setting, provide sufficient levels of support to department- and division-level leadership, and act more proactively to support the mission of the County and goals of the Chair while managing the day-to-day operations of the County. This budget adds \$2.7 million dollars of capacity through the establishment of two new Assistant Chief Operating Officers, and the recruitment of strategy, research, evaluation and continuous improvement specialists to support countywide strategic planning and research and evaluation efforts in a new Strategic Planning, Performance, Agility, Reinvention, and Knowledge (SPARK) unit. I am excited for this opportunity to offer facilitation, support and strategy to every department at Multnomah County.

We are also continuing ongoing funding for areas of the county that engage the public in our decision-making processes: Community Budget Advisory Committees (CBACs), our Office of Community Involvement (OCI), and the Multnomah Leadership Academy. Additionally, this budget includes a few one-time-only key investments in OCI infrastructure, including the addition of a new civic engagement leadership program to be run in partnership with community-based organizations, the continuation of a policy and training coordinator for the office and the addition of stipends for active CBAC committee members to signal how valuable their time and investment in our budget process is.

Infrastructure & Accessibility

In our current environment where access, protection, and safety of data is only growing more important, making sure our data systems are secure and accessible continues to be a hallmark of our infrastructure investments is a priority for me. This includes prioritizing upgrades to Multnomah County's Information Technology (IT), Facilities, and other critical infrastructure and ability to hire and retain a diverse and talented workforce. This year, some of these key investments have included \$4.8 million dollars for an upgrade to the Justice Center electrical system and Juvenile Justice Center security, \$750,000 to deconstruct our Hansen Complex to ready it to become a more useful community asset, \$600,000 for the second phase of our work to create a financial data mart, a continuation of funding for upgrades to our public website and digital suite of services, and one time only funding for public records software, and \$150,000 to update our Land Use Planning code.

Elections Expansion and Rank Choice Voting

Oregonians take great pride in our election system as the first state to establish automatic voter registration and a vote-by-mail system. As Oregon's most populous county, Multnomah has a high bar to meet in every election cycle, and as we implement new voting systems during a presidential election, we will be under even greater scrutiny than ever before. This year, the City of Portland is moving to a single transferable vote ranked-choice system, which will require us to educate the public on this new voting process and how results will be announced, communicate more proactively with voters, and build up our systems to ensure the election is fair, free, and safe. Investments in the Elections Division will ensure a smooth and successful transition and good communication throughout the process. Those investments include \$1 million in one-time-only dollars for infrastructural improvements for the presidential election, charter reform and ranked-choice voting, and additional funding for voter education, outreach, and supervision of these new systems.

Public Campaign Finance

In 2016, Multnomah County voters approved limits on campaign contributions and expenditures for candidates seeking the positions of Multnomah County Chair, Commissioner, Auditor, and Sheriff, but in 2020 the Oregon Supreme Court struck down the limits on expenditures (but not those on contributions). Candidates are currently limited to accepting no more than \$568 from an individual or political committee, however there is no comparable limit on the amount of money that can be expended by a candidate's campaign committee or by third parties. This means candidates from historically underrepresented communities and those who cannot self-finance their campaign, carry over funds from prior campaigns, or rely on financing from third parties to compete for elected office are at a significant systemic disadvantage.

The establishment of a public campaign finance program will be a step toward making our elections more accessible, equitable and trusted by the general public.

This budget includes \$1 million in ongoing funds to explore the possibility of establishing a partnership between Multnomah County and the City of Portland's Small Donor Elections program, which was approved by voters in 2016 and became operational in 2020, to establish a public campaign finance program utilizing a small donor matching model for candidates seeking Multnomah County's elected offices. More than 80% of surveyed Portland donors said that the City's e Small Donor Elections Program had achieved its goal of reducing barriers for everyday people to run for elected office. In January 2025, staff shall return to the Board with a briefing on the feasibility, cost, timeline and necessary steps of developing and implementing a public campaign finance program in time for the November 2026 general election. Should the Board find the establishment of a program in this timeframe feasible, the program shall move forward with all necessary actions identified to facilitate the development and implementation of a public campaign finance program. This initiative will be led by the Chair's Office and will reside in the DCS Director's Office for administrative purposes.

Multnomah County Animal Services

We want all animals in our community to be treated humanely and compassionately. Multnomah County Animal Services is here to take in stray and potentially dangerous animals, reunite pets with families, care for injured animals, find stable homes for animals eligible for adoption, and ensure humane outcomes for every animal in our care. We are often working on behalf of the animals in our community who have lost their home, are in unsafe conditions, and or have had the most difficult challenges in their lives. To address structural challenges and historic underinvestment, we've made critical steps to invest in the people doing this important work. Staff levels at Animal Services have increased from 56 staff members in 2016 to 69 in 2024.

I was proud to add ten additional positions, a 17% increase to the Division in my first budget as Chair last year. To sustain a functioning system that best serves the animals in our care, this year's budget includes strategic investments of more than \$300,000 for emergency medical services and spay and neutering services. For the first time, we are spaying and neutering all animals that come through our system. We must continue this great work.

This budget adds an additional staff position to strengthen our fostering program, and ongoing investments in three additional staff members to provide a better field service response across a service area of 465 square miles. With the significant investments we've made in FY 2024 and 2025, Animal Services will have the tools to truly support the adorable animals our communities love.

Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge (EQRB)

An earthquake ready Burnside Bridge will be a critical lifeline route for first responders after a major earthquake. It will provide safety, create family wage jobs and contribute to the economy by increasing mobility, delivering significant investments to our County, and ensuring the long-term viability of our region's recovery after a Cascadia Subduction Zone event. And we care about who builds it and what they're paid, which is why creating family wage jobs has always been a focus. The EQRB will also provide safer, more accessible multimodal transportation in the heart of Portland, serving our community for the next 100 years. Currently, the bridge is estimated to cost \$895 million dollars. In FY 2025, we are investing funding that will allow us to reach the 30% design milestone and the initiation of the work required to begin construction.

Community Safety and Violence Prevention

Living in a community that feels safe and connected is our goal no matter where you live. Multnomah County is deeply committed to continuing support for upstream prevention programs and interventions while also providing access to mental and behavioral healthcare for community members who need it most. Family stabilization efforts and resource-building work together to provide a true social safety net for many, especially when that work is done across departments and partnerships to break the cycles of violence. This year we continue taking a one-county approach to our strategic investments, spreading them across the Department of Community Justice, the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office, the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, the Department of Human Services, and the Health Department. These investments will have the most impact on the underlying causes that lead to community violence and behavioral health acuity, and will continue to work in our favor to help us develop more and more sustainable long-term strategies for keeping our community safe and supported.

Corrections Health

Making sure our corrections facilities are safe places, both physically and psychologically, is a central aim. The safety and health of people in the County's custody and corrections staff continue to be one of my top priorities. As a County, we are committed to limiting incarceration - but also committed to making sure that people in our custody have access to the care they need and that our staff have the resources to provide that care.

This budget expands Corrections Health funding by \$518,000 with the addition of three staff to the Corrections' Health leadership and Behavioral Health teams.

Combined with ongoing recruitment, hiring, and staff stabilization work throughout Corrections Health, this additional investment supports the goal of increasing the division's capacity to oversee care coordination and therapeutic interventions for adults in custody, particularly for those with significant behavioral health challenges.

And we believe in meeting the needs of Corrections Health in a way that centers equity and focuses on those most vulnerable. As health risk and diseases rarely impact all communities equally, Corrections Health addresses the groups disparately impacted, including efforts in FY 2025 to evaluate policies, procedures and practices to ensure that an equity approach is used whenever possible while maintaining appropriate access to essential care, especially around the mental health and transition services available to both our adult and juvenile populations.

Gun Violence Prevention & Reimagining Justice

A connected, systems-wide approach to violence prevention is a commitment Multnomah County shares with many partners, which is why in FY 2025 we've invested \$1.2 million dollar in our formerly ARP-funded program to address gun violence prevention using deep connections with communities and community-based programs and the continuation of a Gun Violence Behavioral Health Response team that provides a range of culturally relevant, evidence-based, trauma-informed mental health services to improve the social and emotional functioning of youth and families who are impacted by community and gang violence.

Our work in this area also includes the forward-thinking and exciting Reimagining Justice in Cully (RJC) project, designed at the community level to increase trust between law enforcement and Cully residents and to develop non-law enforcement intervention to low level crime.

This is a \$2 million dollar grant-funded initiative that is being matched with \$150,000 of one-time-only County General Funds to support planning and implementation activities to help LPSCC and the Native American Youth and Family Center staff to work closely with Cully residents to develop and implement a community engagement plan and implement human centered design approaches to develop the programs and processes to be implemented in years two and three of this initiative.

Auto and Retail Theft

In 2022, Oregon had the fourth highest rate of vehicle theft in the nation per capita. As organized auto and retail theft skyrocketed, our District Attorney, Michael Schmidt responded with a request for support from Multnomah County and the City of Portland to bring together an impressive and deeply collaborative partnership between the Portland Police Bureau, Gresham Police Department, and Multnomah County Sheriff's Office. In the case of auto thefts, the partnership improves investigations, case preparation, training, prosecutions, and community outreach aimed at vehicle theft prevention. Reported auto thefts are down by half in the last year due to this effort. In addition, effective January 1 of this year, retail theft prosecutors have new tools for cross-jurisdictional charging and are better able to aggregate thefts for enhanced penalties during prosecution. These new laws will help organized retail theft deputy district attorneys prosecute the worst offenders and develop better connections with business owners. I continue my commitment to this innovative approach with a combined total of \$876,000 in dedicated County and City support in anticipation of continued success in resolving these cases quickly and creating a safer county where those who perpetrate these kinds of crimes are held accountable.

Sheriff's Office

It is my pleasure to once again partner with the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office in prioritizing equity and inclusion, fully-funded jail and court systems, a Justice Reinvestment program administrator for this State grant-funded program, continued partnership with the Portland Police Bureau's Family Services Division for education and enforcement actions against those who do not comply with the firearms prohibition through the Gun Dispossession unit. One of the largest focused investments in this department maintains the full capacity of our jail beds so we're successful in protecting victims and the rights of people accused of crimes while also increasing community safety. Our jail bed capacity ensures that we're able to stand up a corrections system that meets Multnomah County's needs and supports the safety, health, and well-being of those who work and reside in our correctional facilities.

Support for Women and Families

Our Department of Community Justice (DCJ) provides supervision and treatment resources to youth, adults, and families to address the underlying issues and societal problems that drive criminal behavior. Changes in this year's budget include the addition of a full-time Project Manager to develop equitable programming and train the department to facilitate it.

The Community Healing Initiative (CHI) Early Intervention and Prevention Program is a family-focused effort to prevent and reduce delinquency, address root causes, and build more community safety and connection. In FY 2025, we are redirecting general fund investments previously allocated to CHI towards secondary prevention programs that serve young people already deeply involved in community justice, including programming for restorative practice, stabilization, and basic skills training services.

The CHI program will continue to leverage state funding through \$233K dollars in grants from the Oregon Youth Authority and over the coming year, the broader array of early intervention CHI services will be reevaluated. This will include assessments of the most appropriate departmental assignment for programming and ultimately a reimagined model that best leverages resources to meet the needs of the community.

Victim Advocates serve as a critical piece of support to survivors of crime as they navigate a confusing and often re-traumatizing criminal justice system that was not built with their needs in mind. DCJ Advocates are the only system-based advocates that can help them access community resources, safety planning, and other support to the healing process. I've heard through our FY 2025 community budget survey and input from DCJ Community Budget Advisory Council members that services for victims of crime are a key priority, one of the reasons I'm approving a general fund restoration of \$176K dollars to maintain one Victim Advocate to support increased workloads and a high demand for these advocacy services.

The cross-departmental work of the Multnomah County Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC) seeks to further criminal justice reform through facilitation, planning, project management, data analysis and community engagement. In a continued effort to improve community safety and reduce the harms caused by the criminal legal system's impact on communities of color, I am pleased to be investing \$1.9 million in General Fund dollars (including Video Lottery) to support LPSCC's public safety efforts, combined with \$900,000 from Oregon State Department of Corrections and MacArthur Foundation to support the Youth Opportunity and Workforce Development (Summerworks) Program and the MacArthur Foundation Safety + Justice Challenge, which focuses on overhauling the pretrial justice system.

I am also pleased to invest \$770,000 dollars to continue the important work of the Diane Wade Program and the pivotal role it plays supporting participants as they rebuild relationships with society and develop supportive networks. The Diane Wade Program (formerly the Diane Wade House) is a culturally and gender responsive transitional housing program for Black and African American women on supervision and/or paroling from a correctional facility to Multnomah County Department of Community Justice (ASD), providing safe housing, resource referrals for co-occurring disorders (substance abuse and/or behavioral health), family reunification, and group and individual counseling. I am thrilled to hear the program has tripled its census in recent months and look forward to positive outcomes and successful exits to permanent housing in FY 2025.

Youth and Family Supports

Childhood is a brief and precious time – one that should be spent learning, playing, and developing in a safe and supportive community. The Multnomah County Department of County Human Services (DCHS) provides resources that enrich environments for youth and young adults, particularly those that impact protective and risk factors. In adulthood, we support people as they navigate threats to their housing stability, survive and preserve beyond experiences of domestic and sexual abuse, and live independently with intellectual and physical disabilities. For the elders in our community, we help to make community connections, including veterans' services and local senior center programming, and offer protections for older or disabled individuals who may be experiencing abuse. These collective expenditures provide a strong foundation for our communities and pay dividends into the future through the improved health, increased income, and reduced criminal involvement we know to be proven life cycle benefits.

Maintaining Core Services

In a year of constraint, I have directed departments to prioritize maintaining basic needs and safety net services for clients and their families. To achieve this goal, our Department of County Human Services (DCHS) team worked to identify redundancies and cost-cutting opportunities in administrative divisions of the department, with an overarching aim to center and sustain client-facing services. The programs and services prioritized for investment include those that prevent eviction and homelessness, those providing economic stability, and programs that focus on early learning and education success and access. This also includes programs outside of DCHS like The Multnomah Youth Commission funded by the Office of Diversity and Equity, which advises and offers recommendations on policies and programs that impact youth through focused, issue-specific committee work, the Elected Official Liaison program, and training and technical assistance, which gains program staff in FY 2025.

Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Service System

Almost 25 years since its launch, the SUN System continues to provide early learning and family stability services to thousands of youth and families across Multnomah County each year. Over 16,000 youth participated in SUN Community Schools programming in 2023, with BIPOC youth representing 70% of those served. From the [True Cost of Community Schools analysis](#) conducted last year, we know that there is a funding gap between what SUN Community Schools are tasked to do, and what it costs to make it happen. We've also heard from families, providers and school districts that there is a collective desire to expand extended SUN day services.

These programmatic and funding challenges will not be resolved without the support and partnership of our SUN Service System stakeholders, including the City of Portland, local School Districts and contracted community-based organizations. For the past six months, the SUN System Sponsor Table has been meeting to discuss the needs of the community and to make collaborative, equity-centered decisions that inform the SUN System procurement scheduled for release later this year. In support of these bridge activities, I am investing \$3.0 million dollars of one-time-only General Funds to ensure that SUN System Family Resource Navigators in Title 1 schools are able to continue providing vital basic needs services during this interim period.

Asylum Seekers

As immigrants and refugees from other countries arrive in Multnomah County, they frequently face challenges accessing basic resources and support. Multnomah County has been working since June of 2023 with the Oregon Department of Human Services to assist 300 asylee households being housed at the Hugo Hotel. We received these families, housed them with state dollars and contracted with community-based organizations with lived experience and brought our own expertise to provide resources, connections and case management. This was expertise that connected and continues to connect each individual with the right resources. This has been a successful community partnership, but our community needs more state and federal investments, and philanthropic support, to help build a sustainable system and services required to deal with a continued influx of immigrants.

In FY 2025, I am allocating \$1.3 million dollars as a one-time-only investment in complement to the Newcomer Support Services Pilot state funding allocation for the same period. These funds will provide gap funding for short-term humanitarian transition services, with a focus on emergency housing. Leveraging our learnings from the See No Stranger program, we will continue to deliver services in partnership with culturally specific organizations that serve immigrants and refugees.

We will also continue to work diligently – in partnership with a statewide coalition of public and private stakeholders – to develop a sustainable model for welcoming newcomers to Oregon with the information and systems mapping that best prepare them as they begin the path to citizenship.

Aging, Disability & Veterans Services

Recent estimates show that 15% of the county’s residents are people 65 and older, 10% are people living with disabilities, and the estimated 34,387 Veterans that live in Multnomah County combine to represent the primary service populations for the Multnomah County Aging, Disability and Veterans Services Division (ADVSD). Our programs for these residents are important because they promote independence, dignity, and choice in the lives of older adults, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and veterans of military service. Multnomah County also hosts the Aging and Disability Resource Connection, a 24-hour information and assistance hotline which helps individuals, families and professionals who are looking for resources to address current or future long-term needs. My budget maintains current service levels and programming for a wide array of vital services for elders meeting the needs of more than 50,000 of our friends and neighbors in person-centered programming, long-term case management, special needs support, prescription assistance, emergency rides and short-term intensive housing case management.

Preschool for All (PFA)

When kids start with a preschool education, they are far more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and succeed in their careers. Preschool for All is making a meaningful long-term investment in the future of our kids and our County. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Multnomah County lost over 20% of its childcare capacity, and expanding our early childhood system will require substantial investment. In order to make Preschool for All universally accessible, we anticipate we will need a total of approximately 11,000 seats in the program by 2030. In FY 2025, Preschool for All will offer over 2,000 high quality preschool seats and remain on-track to achieve universal access by 2030.

When we expand partnerships with higher education institutions and workforce development organizations, we create more accessible pathways for future educators. Foundational to growing our workforce is paying higher wages to educators in Preschool for All programs. Additionally, we recently launched our Facilities Fund to offer \$17 million in FY 2025 to more comprehensively support early care and education providers looking to enhance the quality of care at existing facilities and/or expand to serve additional families or open a new location.

Eligible providers can access grants of up to \$75,000 for family child care and \$750,000 for child care centers and school districts intended to alleviate the financial strain associated with facility improvements, with loans available for further investments.

This program has also expanded capacity across the early childhood education system in an equitable and cost-effective way during a difficult time. We have consistently worked to structure this program to be successful and this year is no exception, with additional funding for project management, contracts, and program specialists for the Program that works to center the voices of Black, Indigenous, and all families and providers of color to implement the community-built Preschool for All vision.

We have also added infant and toddler stabilization investments to increase wages for educators at pilot sites who are not funded through Preschool for all, supporting the viability of those programs, the recruitment and retention of infant and toddler teachers, and increasing pay equity across the entire early education continuum, which is important to ensure stability as we scale up the Preschool for All program.

Intergovernmental Collaboration

It was important to make sure this year's investments were successful in connecting deeply to the work, priorities and commitments of the eight cities within our county's jurisdiction, where many of our residents live, work, play and find the resources to thrive. This means prioritizing both East County and efforts to revitalize Portland's central city. Over the past year, Multnomah County has volunteered to return an estimated \$11 million dollars in visitor development funds over the next three years to revitalize downtown, repair our tourism industry, and offer more resources for the City of Portland, Metro, and Travel Portland's proposals for Special, Limited Time Strategic Reserve funding requests.

This year we've also put a Community Vitality and Economic Opportunity Grant Pilot Program in motion to work with third-party partners to enhance business districts and neighborhoods throughout our county. This strategic investment will focus on creating safe and vibrant spaces for community members to live, work, and shop. Example projects may include graffiti removal, lighting, and other enhancements to activate key pedestrian spaces. And this pilot will build upon similar investments like our allocation of \$1.5 million toward the Clean Start program and a partnership with the City of Portland to light the streets around the Multnomah Building.

Community & Environmental Stability

Developing a truly thriving community requires investments. Not only in programs and initiatives that cover gaps and sustain us, but also in the spaces we use every day, the

air we breathe, the water we drink, the environment we inhabit, and the natural beauty we're uniquely privileged to enjoy. I have spent my entire career as an elected official focusing on Oregon's efforts to combat the climate crisis and protect air quality, leading efforts to transition Oregon away from coal power and developing Multnomah County's 100% renewables resolution, Environmental Justice Resolution, and woodsmoke curtailment policies.

Clean air greatly affects the health and safety of people who live in Multnomah County. Smoke from burning wood to heat homes is a major cause of air pollution and other bulk fuel heating devices, such as pellet stoves, old gas furnaces and fireplaces also contribute to poor indoor and outdoor air quality. Higher levels of wood smoke in the air have been connected to higher levels of sickness like heart and lung illnesses. And we know that poor air quality and pollution is an environmental justice issue. Which is why I'm pleased that we're putting additional energy into our work to address the environmental impacts of wood stoves, with \$150,000 to improve the environment and lives of people in Multnomah County by providing more efficient heating that will reduce air pollution and result in better health.

We're continuing \$3.2 million in funding for environmental health community programs to monitor ethnic or racial disparities in exposures to factors that negatively impact health as well as outcomes as part of an environmental justice approach to public health. This includes more than \$380,000 for responding to the impact of gas leaf blowers, which will be banned in the City of Portland beginning in 2028, with limited enforcement starting in 2026. This investment will provide business incentives and additional time to increase awareness of the new policy. I'm also glad that FY 2025 funding for our Office of Sustainability will focus on completing a revised Climate Justice Plan in collaboration with community partners, continuing work on our climate justice lawsuit to hold big oil accountable for impacts their products have on the climate, and pursuing new climate resilience initiatives in East Multnomah County.

I also appreciate how our community has prioritized funding for spaces that bring us learning, enrichment and joy, including continued capital investments in our libraries. The Board of County Commissioners invested in a Framework for Future Library Spaces in 2017 and voters wisely passed the Library Capital Bond in 2020 to update and expand the County library system because our community is a book-lover's paradise and we want to keep it that way.

My first year in office included the opportunity to attend many groundbreaking and grand opening celebrations throughout our library system and I'm looking forward to more of these over the coming years – especially the new flagship East County Central Library – as these capital investments begin to pay off in new and restored libraries from one end of Multnomah County to the other.

Conclusion

This community has **needed** its safety net for many generations but especially in recent years when Multnomah County is the place people turn to fill the biggest gaps in their lives. I'm proud of how many talented and committed people continue to come towards this work, choose it and bring their lives to it – both within our organization and through the work of our many partners. Together, we are positively impacting the livability, safety and stability of this beautiful place we wake up to every day and have the opportunity to call home.

Centering and embedding equity in our annual budget process requires planful community consultation and engagement. We worked hard this past year to increase opportunities for feedback and diversify communication channels for collecting input from the public – and this is a budget for our county, designed and created in partnership with you. This happened as you participated in our Budget Town Hall in February or were among the more than 1,000 people who took this year's budget survey to let us know more about the things you really care about. Through your comments, questions, and ranking of key budget themes, I heard clearly that the issues of highest priority for those who responded are homelessness and behavioral health services, including mental health and substance use supports. You also highlighted the importance of the Multnomah County Sheriff Office's contribution to public safety, the positive impacts of Preschool for All for youth and families, and the deep value of Library services.

I am gratified to see so much engagement, as well as use of the new Chair's Annual Budget website launched early this year. You utilized and found support in the programs that help to strengthen your own personal safety net and that of your family. As you renewed your passport, took out a marriage license or performed your civic duty as a voter. As you use our shared places – preschool classrooms, libraries, bridges, county roads and county buildings. Thank you for showing up, having opinions, making commitments and walking alongside us to see them through.

Thanks to the many people who've also walked alongside us through this budgeting process.

Thank you to all of the Community Budget Advisory Committees, including the Central CBAC members who took on double duty, facilitated by Office of Community Involvement Director JR Lilly and his staff. You bring lived expertise to this process and help us dream of a better future.

Thank you to the Chair's Office staff: Chief of Staff Jenny Smith, Deputy Stacy Borke and our team members Sara Guest, Hayden Miller, Leah Drebin, Renee Huizinga, Garet Prior, Alicia Temple, Heather Lyons, Stephan Herrera, Ruby Gonzales and Diana Gabaldón, with special thanks to my Budget & Strategic Projects Director Tabitha Jensen for her stewardship of this process. A thank you also to former team members Chris Fick, Raffaele Timarchi, Lakeitha Elliott, April Roman and Lyne Martin. Many thanks for ongoing communications support from Julie Sullivan-Springhetti and Denis Theriault and daily partnership from our Chief Operating Officer Serena Cruz and her team.

Our Multnomah County Central Budget Office is exceptional, and has done thoughtful and strategic work, especially in a year of constraint. My gratitude goes to Budget Director Christian Elkin, County Economist Jeff Renfro, Administrative Analyst Dianna Kaady and the entire budget team for your expertise and hard work. I am also thankful for the County's Chief Financial Officer Eric Arellano whose commitment to fiscal stewardship keeps this County on stable financial footing year after year.

There are more than 6,000 talented employees of Multnomah County who deserve recognition for everything you bring to your jobs, colleagues and community. This is highlighted in our staff's impressive dedication to the County's mission, vision and values and especially to each other and the people we serve in so many ways. All of the investments represented in this budget are meaningless without the critical work you do each day at Multnomah County.

A final thanks to my colleagues on the Multnomah County Board – Sharon Meieran, Susheela Jayapal (former) and Jesse Beason (current), Julia Brim-Edwards and Lori Stegmann. You are leading the way with heart, commitment, and the best interests of your constituents. I look forward to our continued partnership on this year's budget and the policies it highlights.

As we embark on another year of our collaborative path forward, it's with a vision both for what's possible and what's achievable. Let's roll up our sleeves together and get to work.

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

This message was prepared for the FY 2025 Proposed budget. There have been some funding changes since the Proposed budget was released, as reflected in Board and Department amendments. For additional information, please see "Getting to the Adopted Budget" in the Budget Director's Message.