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Multnomah County Executive Budget Message

INTRODUCTION

After years of difficult cuts, I am happy to report this year's Multnomah County budget is stable.

This stability is thanks to years of making tough budget decisions for the long-term, sacrifices by our employees that have included pay freezes, prudent financial decisions, voter support last November of a Library District and a slowly recovering economy.

All those factors leave me cautiously optimistic heading into the FY 2014 budget. However, we still face an uncertain economic recovery and unknown impacts from both the federal sequester and the still-unresolved state budget.

Despite those external uncertainties, my budget preserves and prioritizes badly needed direct services that reflect our county's values of caring for vulnerable people, nurturing diversity and equity, and keeping people safe. And it reflects equally important county values like reducing costs and spending taxpayer money wisely, investing in the future, increasing sustainability and working with our community partners.

The county's difficult budgets the past several years have been hard for the whole community. Those challenging years forced us to think more strategically and to find operating efficiencies that are now deeply embedded in county practices. We will continue on that path in the year ahead by seeking alternative service delivery options -- partnerships with other governments, the private sector and non-profit partners -- to provide the best possible service for our residents and the best use of taxpayer dollars.

I am confident my budget builds on all the gains we have been able to achieve in recent years and makes targeted strategic reinvestments to benefit our community.

In creating this budget, I directed all departments to make a 1 percent reduction from current services levels in their general fund budget requests, and asked internal service providers to build status-quo budgets using current service levels. In the creation of my budget, some services were restored to the current service level and others have taken a reduction through efficiencies.

I also set aside about \$2.1 million to mitigate the worst impact of the federal sequester and potential for state cuts. Those funds can be allocated where needed as we understand more about the impact of federal and state reductions.

The total proposed budget to serve our county's 748,000 residents is \$1.5 billion. Here are some highlights:

LIBRARY DISTRICT

I am thrilled that last fall the voters approved the formation of a Library District, which allows us to return to seven-day-a-week services at our libraries and to continue our outreach to families and seniors in our community.

Multnomah County will continue to operate our wonderful libraries through an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Library District. This guarantees that the same great staff, collections and computer resources are available to everyone in Multnomah County.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The need to address mental health issues in our community is reflected in my budget, which continues to fund the array of prevention and treatment services we provide today for some of our most vulnerable residents as the county continues to be a leader in statewide health care transformation.

Additionally, I propose \$207,000 to begin funding mental health First Aid training, starting with that instruction for more than 700 first-responders in the county. This includes people like nurses, case managers and clerks who will learn how to identify and provide help to people in emotional distress. This training is an essential first step in my long-term commitment to making First Aid for people experiencing a mental health crisis as common as CPR for somebody suffering a heart attack.

Homelessness and the struggles of many people to afford rent remain huge issues. Over the last several years the County has increased our commitment to both shelter and services to homeless people and rent assistance for those struggling to stay in homes. This budget maintains funding for homeless services, including the use of \$1.5 million in one-time-only County money to help the city and Home Forward maintain their commitment to short-term assistance for people at risk of becoming homeless. And the County budget also includes \$1 million for the system to work with runaway youth and \$1 million for enhanced coordination to increase immediate temporary housing access for hundreds of homeless families.

This budget fully funds our current physical health services at our County clinics and our public health services including our continued efforts to fight obesity. The budget provides \$3.34 million for the newly expanded Southeast Health Center that brings primary care, family medicine, behavioral health services, pharmacy lab services and dental care closer to Southeast Portland residents.

CHILDREN

My budget continues and deepens the County's commitment to Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) community schools, which is a nationally recognized model for helping children and their families succeed in school and in life.

This budget would use \$986,000 from the County's General Fund to invest in eight high-poverty SUN community school sites that were historically funded by the Portland Children's Levy and that will be affected by compression from the Library District. Those sites are at Jackson Middle School,

Whitman Elementary School, Franklin High School, Mill Park Elementary School, Gilbert Heights Elementary School, Menlo Park Elementary School, Glenfair Elementary School and Parklane Elementary School.

This budget would use about \$245,000 to double the number of Summer Youth Connect internships at Multnomah County to 100 for a program proven to help children of color gain work experience, earn money for college and keep them employed during the summer.

PUBLIC SAFETY

About half of our locally generated General Fund budget goes toward public safety.

My budget maintains our current 1,310 jail beds and funds all of the current county-funded 64 Deputy District Attorney positions.

This budget also funds our critical community corrections system where we supervise about 7,000 adults on probation and parole in our community, and our juvenile justice system including detention, probation and treatment for young violators. The county's Department of Community Justice will continue to implement the best practices approach that balances proactive supervision along with swift and certain sanctions for offenders as well as treatment to address addictions.

The troubling problem of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in our community requires our continued attention. This budget maintains our ongoing commitment to the CSEC system with a \$1 million County General Fund investment in law enforcement to catch and prosecute those who exploit children and to provide treatment for girls younger than age 18 who are CSEC victims.

I also will continue to support efforts to make our public safety system more efficient. My budget provides \$180,000 to equip all district attorneys with tablets using secure wireless Internet access for courtroom use and provides funding for wireless communications in the courthouse.

EMERGENCY READINESS

So many tragic recent events nearby and around the country remind us of the need to invest in emergency preparedness. At the County, we are responsible for multiple basic government functions that must continue in an emergency and for the safety of our community's most vulnerable citizens during an emergency. My budget helps us better address these issues by adding one position to our Emergency Management structure for continuity of operations in an emergency and a second position to address the needs of vulnerable populations during an emergency.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT

At Multnomah County we continue our "Multnomah Evolves" efforts to create efficiencies and spend our resources wisely in order to invest in vital community services.

In this budget, we will invest in new fleet technology systems that will replace antiquated systems with more efficient tools. We will replace an estimated 30 cars a year over the next three years and replace other vehicles to decrease maintenance costs and get better fuel efficiencies. And we will continue to seek out the latest innovations with transportation, vehicle maintenance and other improvements to lower costs.

This budget also invests about \$1 million in new technology to replace old systems, helping staff to become more efficient in serving residents.

CAPITAL ASSETS

Our county's facilities asset strategic plan aims to reduce the county's 3.1-million-square-foot footprint while recapitalizing and replacing aging buildings that are becoming liabilities.

The budget sets aside \$1 million for early planning to replace our century-old downtown Courthouse, which is both seismically unsafe and no longer large enough to safely accommodate increased use over the past several decades.

The budget includes \$8.9 million worth of investments for ongoing capital needs to make sure our public buildings are all current, safe and usable -- including our planned state-of-the-art Health Department headquarters in downtown Portland in partnership with Home Forward, the city of Portland's housing authority.

The county continues to work with the federal government, the state of Oregon and the City of Portland in our successful project to replace the Sellwood Bridge.

The county works as a key partner with not-for-profit organizations and other local governments to develop service sites in our community particularly in underserved mid and east county. My budget commits \$125,000 in a one-time capital investment for The Children's Center at Steven's Creek Crossing, a partnership with Home Forward and Neighborhood House that will be an integral support site in Hillsdale Terrace; and \$500,000 in a one-time capital investment in the Earl Boyles/David Douglas Early Learning Facility, a partnership with the David Douglas School District and the Children's Institute that will close the student achievement gap in a high-need area.

CONCLUSION

As is the case every year, this budget could not come together without the help of many hands, all of whom merit my deepest thanks.

Thanks to my board colleagues Deborah Kafoury, Loretta Smith, Judy Shiprack and Diane McKeel for working together to craft a budget that helps make our community a better place for all our residents.

Thanks to District Attorney Rod Underhill, Sheriff Dan Staton and all our Circuit Court judges for collaborating on a budget that keeps our community safe while preserving civil rights we all hold dear.

Thanks to County Auditor Steve March for his constant vigilance to ensuring we are spending money wisely and delivering services efficiently.

Thanks to Budget Director Karyne Kieta and her staff for their long hours doing the analysis, crunching the numbers and assembling this budget. Thanks to the department directors, departmental leaders and their budget staffs for their time and dedication to provide us with solutions that meet our challenges. And thanks to my staff, especially Chief of Staff Marissa Madrigal and Chief Operating Officer Joanne Fuller for their tireless efforts and sound advice.

Thanks to all the employees of Multnomah County, who have enabled the county to provide continued excellence in service to our community with their pay sacrifices and can-do spirit.

And a big thanks to the voters of Multnomah County, who kept faith with us by overwhelmingly supporting a Library District that allows our award-winning library system to restore hours and services.

This budget reflects a continued commitment to getting the most value possible from our common resources by collaborating with our community partners in the City of Portland and all our county's cities, Metro, Home Forward and school districts. Similarly, this budget also reflects the great work and additional resources delivered by the non-profits that are funded by the county.

In conclusion, I am honored by the responsibility to serve as the Chair of Multnomah County. I am equally inspired by the constant dedication and hard work of my co-workers at the county to strive toward our common goal of making our community a better place. And I am confident this budget will help us move toward achieving that common goal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Cogen". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jeff Cogen
Multnomah County Chair