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Multnomah County Executive Budget Message

Introduction

The 2018 Multnomah County executive budget presents one of my greatest challenges so far.

When I look back three years, I am inspired by Multnomah County's success in tackling seemingly insurmountable problems. We have sheltered and housed homeless veterans and families, restoring dignity and independence. We expanded physical and mental health services, extending care to thousands who previously had none. We launched an aggressive replacement of obsolete bridges and buildings, ensuring a safe and functional future. Throughout, we maintained strong fiscal policies that have ensured that our budget is balanced three years ahead.

But, we are bracing for a storm of an unknown size. State and federal commitments to our community are uncertain. We do not know whether critical investments in housing, mental and physical health care and other services will continue.

This uncertainty has led me to develop a budget that builds on our progress in these key areas, keeps the organization fiscally sound and directs county dollars to where they can accomplish the most.

My time at Multnomah County has proven to me that we need to invest in people, not in programs or more process. We cannot afford to ignore people facing challenges until they end up in a costly jail, emergency room or shelter bed. Prevention and targeted spending now will save money down the line. But those investments will also save lives and recover hope.

Toward that end, I have asked each department at Multnomah County to comb through their budget and offer up savings from administrative costs. I've also asked departments to examine each program for its effectiveness, or whether the program is already being provided by a community based partner. We must put at the center of our work the people we serve and the outcomes we hope to achieve.

This budget creates a roadmap for doing that. It also represents a change in the way government operates, and it means that some positions and programs that have been in place at Multnomah County will not remain.

These are difficult decisions to make, but I have never been more hopeful that Multnomah County can rise to the challenge. Consider the opioid epidemic that has ravaged families across the United States, in every community including ours. Yet unlike the rest of the country where opiate deaths are still going up, opiate

deaths here are not increasing. That's in large part because Multnomah County employees have worked with the community to change how doctors prescribe pain killers, trained thousands of people on the rescue drug naloxone and diverted drug users to treatment instead of jail.

We have more work to do on opiates, but we are making progress. Our targeted strategies and careful investments are making a difference for this community overall, and in individual lives. I am confident that even in the face of uncertainty, when we are determined, thoughtful, and working together, Multnomah County will emerge stronger and healthier.

INVESTING IN STABLE HOUSING

This budget maintains our unprecedented investment in the work of the Joint Office of Homeless Services. When I became chair I sat down with leaders in city and county government, business and the faith community to form a vision for how we could invest our dollars to fight homelessness in the most efficient way.

Together we formed A Home For Everyone, a community coalition to end homelessness. We took on veteran homelessness to start and created a seamless system of support that ensures any veteran in our community who finds themselves homeless will have the resources they need to get back into housing.

Last year the city and county added \$20 million to this effort, doubling the number of public shelter beds and increasing our investment in getting people into housing and keeping people from losing their housing in the first place. More than 25,000 people were served by our housing retention and homeless service system. More than 6,600 accessed emergency shelter. More than 5,200 were prevented from losing their home in the first place and 4,600 were connected with permanent housing.

My budget maintains this investment and adds additional resources to expand services in our family system to help more homeless kids and their parents. This budget also funds a local housing voucher pilot, which will allow families and seniors to maintain housing, even if they face rent hikes or medical crises.

And finally, this budget includes a new eviction outreach effort, connecting tenants who are facing eviction to resources so that they can keep their housing instead of being forced to sleep on a friend's couch, in their car or on the streets.

AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

The county must focus our health care dollars where they make the greatest impact: on our most vulnerable, highest poverty communities.

As gentrification and our housing crisis push more and more families further east, we need to make sure our health clinics and resources follow them. This improves the health of our community but it also reduces costs for patients and increases how far our dollars stretch to meet our needs.

This budget maintains our core services and increases support for our mental health crisis system.

This budget also funds our overdose prevention work with ongoing dollars. Recognizing that the opioid crisis will be with us in the coming years, we need to have a system in place to help overcome the trauma of addiction.

INVESTING IN FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Intervention and crisis response are a critical part of Multnomah County's mission. But often the best intervention comes before crisis strikes and this is especially true when it comes to children and families.

This budget maintains our commitment to core services in the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) initiative. We know that these services and our community collaboration help us respond quickly and thoughtfully to community needs. Earlier this year when families in the Normandy Apartments faced rent increases of up to 100 percent, our SUN providers were able to step in and help the 26 children who were threatened with moving away from their school at a critical time.

Those kids were able to stay put because of the work we've done to change the status quo at Multnomah County.

This year, for the first time, we will be partnering with the City of Gresham to integrate additional mentoring opportunities for young people in East Multnomah County who are in need of support, continuing the county's focus on putting resources where they're needed most.

Part of that work involves responding when the community calls for help. Over the last two years I have heard directly from families, community organizations, teachers and superintendents a consistent call for more help for our children who are experiencing deep trauma and in need of deeper support or mental health treatment.

This budget includes a new investment in mental health case management services, furthering our collaboration with teachers, improving our outreach and prevention efforts, and bringing additional skills training and resources for children and families.

We are also working to change the way our anti-poverty programs work, putting people at the center of our efforts. A variety of existing County programs provide a single service such as rent assistance or home visiting. But that's not enough. We must better align and coordinate our efforts so that we truly begin to break the cycle of poverty.

This budget includes new investments building on the success of the Healthy Birth Initiative Program, which supports pregnant African American women and their families to improve birth outcomes and long term health through culturally specific strategies. By layering this work with resources and support from the Department of County Human Services, we will ensure that families who participate in this vital health program also have improved access to case management, financial education, housing stability and workforce supports.

SAFER COMMUNITIES

In March, Disability Rights Oregon released a report on the condition of our county jails, particularly focused on the treatment of people struggling with mental illness.

The findings were shocking. I immediately directed Health Department Director Joanne Fuller to assume responsibility for Corrections Health and to work with Dr. Michael Seale, medical director for Corrections Health, to increase access to treatment and recovery for people in jail.

In response, I've proposed new funding for mental health counselors at the jail booking area to improve coordination of community services for individuals leaving the jail and to facilitate immediate access to care

for those booked during peak hours. I have also included funding to expand clinic hours and directed our corrections health leadership to work closely with jail command staff to ensure that the care provided in jail is timely and meets the unique needs of the individual.

These changes are necessary but we know that jail is not an appropriate place for treating individuals with mental health and substance abuse issues. In last year's budget, we began moving public safety dollars away from jail beds and towards programs and services to reduce recidivism.

One of those efforts is the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program and I have maintained that investment in this budget. Modeled after a successful program in place in King County, Washington, LEAD will allow police and prosecutors to divert people with a low-level drug possession charge into treatment instead of jail.

These efforts should help us tackle the widespread and persistent racial and ethnic disparities in our criminal justice system. These issues must be addressed and we know what works: diversion, access to services, and opportunities for success.

That's why I've proposed we dedicate up to 50 positions in the Summer Works Program specifically for juveniles involved in the criminal justice system. It's vital that the youth we serve have an opportunity to gain important job skills and are empowered to succeed.

SPENDING WHERE IT MATTERS

With the uncertainty that we face today, it's important to me that our budget is balanced over the coming three years and that we're taking steps to safeguard tax dollars.

First, we have established a side account with the Public Employees Retirement System, allowing us to bring in a greater return on the dollars that Multnomah County has set aside to smooth out the rising cost of our payroll. This makes good on our promises to our employees and to taxpayers.

This budget also dedicates \$25 million to replacing our unsafe central courthouse and health department headquarters. Spending on this important infrastructure today, instead of waiting for the bills to come due tomorrow, saves us money in the long term.

Finally, I am setting aside \$2.7 million to provide stability for our most vital programs as federal and state funds ramp down. It's not clear today what the financial impact will be of the federal and state budgets, but it's clear that we need to plan for cuts.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

The development of this budget has involved difficult choices. And it has been important to me to hear from community voices throughout its development.

I want to thank the Citizen Budget Advisory Committee for its work weighing the budget choices in front of us and offering their voices and oversight to this process.

I also want to thank Commissioners Sharon Meieran, Loretta Smith, Jessica Vega Pederson and Lori Stegmann for their steadfast commitment to the values of justice and fairness. Their leadership on the Multnomah County Commission is a vital part of our success at the county and I appreciate their partnership.

And as much as this document relies upon the commission to make it a reality, it wouldn't exist at all without the work of Budget Director Mike Jaspin and his staff. They have put in countless hours counting and recounting, balancing and rebalancing. And the budget I am presenting today is a product of that diligence and commitment to excellence.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the thousands of employees at Multnomah County. For some of you, the financial impact of this budget will be very direct. While departments have tried to direct cuts toward vacant positions, that was not always possible. I recognize the sacrifice that this budget is asking many to take. I do not take that lightly.

I want to thank each of our employees for their dedicated service, their commitment to the cause of improving our community, and their daily contributions. They make people's lives better, and I believe we all owe them gratitude and respect.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah Kafoury". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deborah Kafoury