

How would the commissioner/chair describe the purpose of the current inspections of county correctional facilities?

**ORS 169.040: “The county court or board of county commissioners of each county is the inspector of the local correctional facilities in the county. The court or board shall visit local correctional facilities operated by the county at least once in each regular term and may visit local correctional facilities within the county that are not operated by the county. When the court or board visits a local correctional facility, it shall examine fully into the local correctional facility, including, but not limited to, the cleanliness of the facility and the health and discipline of the persons confined. If it appears to the court or board that any provisions of law have been violated or neglected, it shall immediately give notice of the violation or neglect to the district attorney of the district.”**

Multnomah County Commissioners visit local correctional facilities - Inverness Jail and the Multnomah County Detention Center - annually (except during COVID). During these visits, they tour various areas of the facilities, and presentations are provided by Multnomah County Sheriff’s Office leaders and staff, as well as Corrections Health leaders and staff. These provide an overview of various services, and provide a brief window into how the correctional facilities are functioning.

The presentations and tours are carefully planned and choreographed, which can be necessary because otherwise it would be very difficult to coordinate all that needs to be covered with the number of people involved in the visit. But it makes less of an examination of the site and more of a presentation and viewing of the site.

As a Commissioner, I have appreciated the opportunity to visit the jails and develop a broad understanding of how they are laid out and how policies intersect with the reality of our correctional facilities. I believe that if I saw an egregious health or safety violation I would be equipped to call this out. However, we are not auditors, legal experts or other experienced professionals in the legal standards for inspecting jails. If the purpose of the visit is to actually inspect or examine facilities in terms of meeting legal requirements for health and safety, our single visit doesn’t do this, and adding visits, including with other community members, would not make a significant impact. It would only create more bureaucracy and take many hours of valuable time away from people who could be doing meaningful work, without any benefit.

There is an issue, but the proposal is not the solution.

What information is typically provided to the board during these inspections?

We typically receive an overview of how the jails function, how they are staffed, what support is given to people in custody, what they eat, etc. We receive information about particular programs that are provided - for example, the Treatment Readiness dorm, where individuals prepare to go into substance use treatment on exiting jail. We learn about programs that are being planned, such as potentially the ability to access training and educational materials in jails to help develop skills that may be beneficial when exiting custody. And we hear from some healthcare providers about health services and visit the clinics.

Is there a report or some other form of public communication that happens after the board inspects correctional facilities to educate the public about the observations?

Not that I'm aware of. However, I think this would be a good idea. I'm not sure who would be responsible for it or what would be included, but it can help make our system more transparent to the public, and let people know that at the very least Commissioners are visiting the jails.

Does the commissioner/chair think the inspections could be improved or expanded? If so, how?

As I mentioned in detail in question 1, Commissioner visits do not and should not constitute official "inspections" because we simply do not have the expertise. Even if they were, the advance notice and need for planning makes it difficult to have an unfiltered window into day-to-day operations. I think that rather than expanding on the visits that do happen, there should be a different approach to jail examinations/inspections. I'm not an expert, but maybe if there was a way to have more spontaneous visits (a requirement that corrections facilities always be available for "spot checks" by Commissioners or their appointees, and requiring that Commissioners engage in at least one visit per year that is unannounced except to the extent that planning is needed for health and safety purposes).

What does the commissioner/chair think about the requirement to do four inspections a year with three constituents?

It depends what the desired outcome of the proposal is - what are we trying to change? If it is felt that there is not adequate inspection and problems may be flying under the radar, then this proposal would not help fix that.

In addition to not providing additional relevant information, adding visits would take a lot of hours of valuable time (staff, administrators, commissioners) away from a lot of people doing valuable work. The visits take weeks to prepare for, and without a clear added benefit, they do not seem worth the cost.

Having constituents join would also not improve the process. The three selected individuals might have an opportunity to hear information about policies and see the jails, but they do not have any additional expertise to help identify issues and potential solutions. Furthermore, it would raise issues of who the constituents would be and how they would be selected. And, as the proposal is described, the information would not get out to the broader public, so it's not clear what the purpose would be, except to provide some information to three additional people.

If we want a more accountable system (which I strongly believe in), then we need a very different approach to identifying what that system should be, and I think the outcome would not involve increasing the number of visits to the jails, or adding constituents to the jails visits, within the parameters of the system we have now. We need to elevate the role of audits, and should potentially hire a consultant familiar with this type of work to identify what our specific goals are, and then make some informed recommendations on how best to achieve them.

I believe in the premise of the proposal - that jails be appropriately inspected and held to account. However, I believe that this proposal does not actually address the problem it is seeking to address, and it will add layers of bureaucracy, cost and time for no clear gain.