



Office of Community Involvement



MULTNOMAH COUNTY CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE: RECOMMENDATION ON JAIL INSPECTIONS

The Charter Review Committee is currently considering a recommendation that would amend the county Charter to require that each member of the Board of County Commissioners inspect county jail facilities a minimum of four times a year. For the inspections, each commissioner's office would convene a group of at least three constituents to accompany them. The constituents would be charged with documenting their observations of jail conditions, including conducting interviews with people who are incarcerated, and writing a year-end report on their findings, to be shared with their commissioner and the public.

The committee is interested in hearing from the Sheriff's Office, as the administrator of county jails, concerning some of the administrative logistics of its proposal. The committee hopes the Sheriff's Office can provide a written response to members' questions in advance of their next meeting on June 28th. The committee is particularly interested in learning:

- Would constituents accompanying commissioners be subject to background checks? If so, how would a criminal record impact a constituent's ability to participate?

A signed MCSO Facility Entry Agreement and completed Records Check Authorization form are required for anyone requesting access to an MCSO facility. Participation in the tour would be facilitated after the Records Check Authorization has been approved. Those who do not meet the required criteria for access would be notified they were not able to be part of the tour.

*These forms should be provided at least 10 days in advance of the tour to ensure adequate time for processing. *Examples of both forms are attached.*

- What do jail administrators see as some of the logistical hurdles to having each member of the board of commissioners inspect county corrections facilities a minimum of four times a year, each accompanied by at least three constituents?

Treating everyone in our custody with dignity and respect is MCSO's top priority. Those in our custody often find themselves at an all-time low point in their life, a place where exposure to community members, compliance auditors and elected officials makes them particularly vulnerable to feelings of judgement and shame.

Our jail population is subject to numerous required tours as mandated by federal, state and local standards. These include community reviews by the Corrections Grand Jury, as well as Oregon State Jail Inspections, health and fire inspections, tours by members of the advocacy community, such as, Disability Rights Oregon and Commissioner and other elected officials' tours. To help minimize impact to the adults in our custody, we organize these tours in groups.



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These types of tours are comprehensive and require the attention of our administrative team and line staff in equal measure, which takes away from the day to day operations serving our adults in custody. Tours often cause disruption to programming and daily housing activities that may be scheduled to occur during the tour, such as group and individual programming, clothing exchanges, recreation times and religious programs.

MCSO is committed to transparency and accountability by providing access to our facilities, striking a balance between access and over exposing the vulnerable population we serve in our jails.

- For the board's current inspections, how does your office determine what information to present to the board?

Our tour agendas are driven by a comprehensive tour of each facility, updates we have made in our facilities or processes and specific requests by the Board of County Commissioners to better understand a particular piece of our operations.

- Do you currently provide non-identifying information on numbers and status of mental health patients and physically unhealthy inmates in the county jails as part of commissioners' inspections? Do you see any barriers to making this part of the inspection process?

MCSO is fortunate to partner with the Health Department's Corrections Health to provide medical and mental health care for our adults in custody. This information would best be provided from data they collect. While MCSO has no concerns with this information being part of the inspection process, we would defer to Corrections Health relative to any barriers they may have in releasing this information.

- The committee is considering adding a requirement that as part of the new inspection process, constituents accompanying commissioners would interview people who are currently incarcerated about their experience in county jails. Are there security concerns for implementing this? If so, what are they?

Adults in custody are interviewed by the Corrections Grand Jury as part of this annual process led by the District Attorney. Those selected to be interviewed must be sentenced to ensure there are no conflicts with a pending court process. Because the current census in the jail includes very few sentenced adults in custody, there is a limited selection of people available for interviews.

Again, it is important to note that adding additional interviews places a burden on those in our custody who are eligible to have these types of conversations. Asking a simple question such as describing their jail experience has the potential to cause additional trauma or re-traumatization in an already challenging environment.



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Security concerns are less of an issue than the impact this would have on adults in custody. With a combination of a records check being completed, screening prior to entering the facility and an escorted tour, we are able to manage any security concerns.

- The Sheriff's Office is also welcome to share additional information it thinks would be valuable for the committee to consider in its decision-making process.

Providing transparency in our operations and facilities to the Commissioners and community is of utmost importance to MCSO. The concern we see with the expansion of in-person tours is not related to transparency, but is rooted in ensuring our operations continue to support everyone who is in our custody. We are interested in exploring ways in which we can create more shared awareness of work with our community that would not place unnecessary additional stress on the adults in our custody.