

Dear Safety & Justice Subcommittee,

The Office of Community Involvement has been following your subcommittee's emerging proposal regarding the requirements of county commissioners to visit and inspect jails with more frequency. We're aware that the subcommittee has identified a potential role for the Community Involvement Committee (CIC) in providing community members to participate in the visits, and wanted to provide the subcommittee with background information on the role of the CIC, and share some concerns about involving the CIC in your proposal.

The CIC serves as Multnomah County's advisory body on community engagement and involvement, and its members are appointed by the Board of County Commissioners. The committee was established in the County Charter, and the purpose and structure of the committee are outlined in County Code - the policies and laws of the County established by the Board. Their duties as stated in County Code include: (A) Identifying community needs, concerns and opportunities regarding community involvement in county-decision making, and providing information to the Office of Community Involvement ("OCI"). (B) Serving as a resource for the OCI in developing and evaluating community outreach and input plans, and providing recommendations for community members to involve in input processes. (C) Working with the OCI to develop countywide community involvement best practices and advise on reducing barriers to civic participation and engagement. (D) Assisting in facilitating communication between county elected officials, employees and the community by informing the community of involvement and input opportunities.

On an annual basis, the committee decides on two to three priority areas of study in the county's community engagement work, forms project subcommittees, and develops recommendations that are approved by the full committee and presented to the Board of County Commissioners. Recent topics of study have included examining how the County engages with immigrant and refugee communities, community engagement around extreme weather events, and engaging BIPOC on advisory committees.

OCI Community Involvement Coordinator Olivia Kilgore, the primary staff support for the committee, and OCI Director Dani Bernstein have several concerns about a charter proposal that would involve the CIC in jail visits:

- Staff feel that visiting jails is outside of the scope and role of the CIC as stated in County Code, which establishes an advisory role for the committee specifically on issues of community involvement, and does not involve the committee in studying or inspecting any particular county service or program.
- The committee and the Office of Community Involvement do not have any significant role with the public safety departments (Department of Community Justice, District Attorney, and Sheriff's Office) and do not have any decision-making authority regarding public safety policies and programs. Committee members would be obligated to give their time to an area of work over which they have no authority and very limited influence.
- Committee members don't necessarily bring personal, professional or lived experience with the criminal legal system. We recruit members with a variety of experiences and interests who are drawn to the committee's focus on community involvement in decision making and reducing barriers to civic participation.
- Our understanding is that background checks would be required to participate in jail visits. We intentionally do not conduct background checks as part of the committee application process. We feel this is an important equity practice to reduce barriers to participation and not dissuade members of our community who have been justice involved or do not have a social security number from applying. If this became a new responsibility for the CIC, it would only be open to committee members willing and able to undergo a background check.
- Almost all of the committee's meetings are held during the evening and members have limited daytime availability. We have concerns about creating an additional obligation for several committee members that asks for a significant amount of their volunteer time, and creates an obligation that needs to be met during 9-5 working hours.

- The committee has been operating virtually since March 2020 and will likely continue to hold the majority of its meetings virtually. Virtual engagement has become an important tool for participation and accessibility, and even for meetings held in-person, we always offer the option to participate remotely. Staff are concerned about adding a responsibility that requires in-person engagement, especially as our communities continue to navigate the challenges of the pandemic.
- Within their purpose outlined in County Code, the committee can choose any topics of study from year to year and requiring their involvement in jail visits would be a departure from the committee's typical practice of deciding their own areas of interest and study. We would have serious concerns about any changes made to the committee's responsibilities without engaging committee members, and changes that would be fixed in charter and limit future iterations of the committee from determining all of their own areas of study.

If the subcommittee would like to include community members in the visits and inspections of county jails, we would encourage the subcommittee to consider other avenues that are more aligned with public safety issues and systems, or to allow for more flexibility than naming a specific group provides.

We would be happy to answer any questions from the subcommittee or the full MCCRC at a meeting or in writing.

Thank you for all of your work,

Dani Bernstein, Director
Olivia Kilgore, Community Involvement Coordinator
Multnomah County Office of Community Involvement