

April 18, 2016

Multnomah County Charter Review Committee

Dear Committee Members,

We would like to thank you for your work and for this opportunity to speak with you regarding services provided by Multnomah County to our communities, most importantly the Sheriff.

The Citizen Budget Advisory Committee (CBAC) to the Sheriff's Office is a program of the Multnomah County Citizen Involvement Committee (CIC). Both the CIC and CBAC are independent of the County and are therefore in a position to provide input and feedback to the Sheriff's Office and the Board of County Commissioners. We value our opportunity to learn about the County budget process, how the Sheriff manages the budget, and the operations of the Sheriff's Office. We value our ability to share our independent and informed judgments with the Sheriff and his staff, as well as with officials in the County.

The Citizen Budget Advisory Committee to the Sheriff meets ten months out of the year (sometimes twice a month) and in addition to visits from Sheriff Daniel Staton, we are regularly briefed by several knowledgeable members of the Sheriff's Office. We have done "ride-alongs" with the deputies and toured the jails several times to ensure we have a working knowledge of the duties, responsibilities and challenges faced at all levels of the Sheriff's Office.

We understand that among many parts of the charter, you are again being asked to evaluate the Multnomah County citizen's right to elect their Sheriff versus having one appointed by the board. We at the CBAC would respectfully ask you to consider the following reasons as to why that action would be detrimental to the public safety of all citizens of Multnomah County:

- An elected Sheriff provides a "check and balance" to the public safety system and the political system generally, as he or she is directly responsible to the citizens. The Sheriff's job is public safety-period. As we know, County Chairs and County Commissioners have constant turn over. We are concerned that if the Sheriff was appointed, constant turn over and change in focus, will ultimately decrease the quality and continuity of law enforcement services to our communities.
- Citizens in rural areas rely on the Sheriff for far more than just law enforcement. Many of the Sheriff's CBAC members are or have been members of Sheriff's Office public safety community outreach programs, such as the Safety Action Teams, or OATH (Oregonians Against Trafficking Humans). These programs are a cost effective way to educate and help communities help each other. The Sheriff's Office has a long and distinguished history in Community Policing. Deputies are a valuable part of and partner with residents and other agencies in our communities.
- The rural areas of Multnomah County may have less "residents" than the surrounding cities; however, the rural areas encompass some of the most popular visitor and citizen recreation destinations. Sauvie Island, Multnomah Falls, and the Gorge have millions of visitors and citizens recreating annually. The Sheriff has patrol contracts with the cities of Maywood Park, Wood Village, and Troutdale. Why? Because those cities want the Sheriff as their service provider.
- The Sheriff is mandated to patrol and keep the rivers safe. As you know, the Columbia, Willamette, and Sandy rivers alone have an immense amount of fishing, boating, residential homes, and other recreation for which the

Sheriff is responsible. The communities on the river need a Sheriff that is present and accountable for the safety of their homes and waterways.

- The Sheriff's management of the County jails is detailed in the Grand Jury Report. We at the CBAC encourage you to read this annual report. At least once yearly a grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of every correctional facility and youth correction facility in the county. The grand jury is entitled to free access at all reasonable times to such facilities and without charge, to all public records in the county pertaining thereto. The grand jurors physically inspect facilities and hear witness testimony from those who operate, are housed within, or are associated in some form, with the operation and management of those facilities.
- The 2015 Report of the Multnomah County Corrections Grand Jury Report emphasized a point made by the 2014 Corrections Grand Jury, and by almost every witness interviewed: "The corrections system has unintentionally become the community's main resource to treat mental illness, although the system is not funded or resourced accordingly". The 2015 grand jury report also based on consistent testimony from witnesses, recommended that "the county and the local health care community prioritize mental health services and treatment in order to remove this significant burden from the Corrections Department and place it with the health care sector where it belongs." The jurors also said "Jails fall short of providing adequate services for all 43% of inmates affected by mental health issues." The mental illness issue is nationwide, and needs funding from the Commissioners of mental health services, not an appointed Sheriff.

We would like to thank you for your time in hearing our concerns and hope that you determine that changing the county charter from an elected Sheriff to appointed would be detrimental to the citizens of Multnomah County. We believe an elected Sheriff is the voice for public safety matters in our communities and should be chosen by the public. In regards to jail management, the Sheriff is required to have state executive level management certification and often can have advanced degrees. The County Chair and the County Commissioners do exercise oversight of the Sheriff's budget and inspection of the jails.

Respectfully,

Sheriff's Office CBAC Members:

Ethan Atkinson (Portland)  
Diana Chavez (Portland)  
Julie Cieloha (Sauvie Island)  
Dana Fuller (Wood Village)  
Phyllis Thiemann (Corbett)