

UNION COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT RATED 48TH WORST FACILITY OUT OF 48

HB 2712 – TASK FORCE ON STATE COURT FACILITIES- A fund specifically set aside for court facilities. I respectfully submitted to you our story and hope that you are aware that this fund has real value for districts like ours.

Some people say that “Union County needs a new courthouse.” We say “Union County needs a Courthouse.” There has not been a courthouse in Union County since 1991.

Michelle Leonard, Trial Court Clerk – 10th Judicial District
Honorable Russell West, Presiding Judge
Honorable Brian Dretke, Circuit Judge

UNION COUNTY COURT FACILITY TIMELINE

1989, the Union County Courthouse posed some serious safety issues. A warning was actually posted which, in so many words, said enter at your own risk. Falling ceiling plaster and mold were regular occurrences and the 2nd floor was condemned. The courtroom and administrative offices were on this floor. Immediate steps were taken to find a safer place for the Circuit Court to operate. Eventually, the entire courthouse was condemned.

In December of 1990 the courtroom and administrative offices were moved to a basement below our local Jail facility, the following month the records office was moved. We held court for almost two years 15 feet underground beneath the Union County Jail.

By 1992 the entire courthouse had been condemned and plans to repair were abandoned due to the extensive amount of work that would have to be done. The Commissioners prepared to submit a bond to the voters. The bond was voted down in 1993 and again in 1994.

In the fall of 1992, the courts were moved to the St. Joseph Building, a hospital remodeled to the extent the structure would allow. The space has never really adequately accommodated a court facility. Image #1 shows the original shelving in a room that once was used for an operating/delivery room. Glass shelves still have labels from the 1950's for surgical instruments. Many people who have worked here were born in this room. Judicial Department jokes with Doug Bray, Multnomah County Trial Court Administrator, who was born in here as well, that the Judicial Department honored his life by housing a circuit court at his birth place.

Image #1. This Operating room houses 3 workstations, our network and computer rack. It is also serves as a supply area and does not have windows in staff occupied areas.





Image #2
 Our customers, to get from civil records to a courtroom or pay for forms and filing fees, they have to travel from area #1 back down to the ground level out the front door and walk around to the entrance located at area #3 (and vice versa). Staff and judges also navigate outside and through attic ways to get between our departments.

The rest of the building is occupied by Parole and Probation, ESD (a preschool is located on the premises, two floors from where sex offenders report).

We occupy (including 2 courtrooms) less than 7000 sq ft, our judges and staff are segregated by inaccessible routes, and our customers cannot get to the courtrooms after visiting civil records without traveling back outside, Image #2 shows our building from the street and I have circled the areas we occupy. As you look at this photo, there are three areas I have noted. #1 houses our civil records, all civil cases; probate; small claims; juvenile records; family law; tech office; and Trial Court Administrator. In area #2 we have our 3rd floor courtroom, 12 person jury box and a couple of attorneys' rooms, as well as the Presiding Judge and his support staff. Area #3 is our entrance to both courtrooms and Parole and Probation (who are on the 2nd floor). There, you will also find our services for: accounting and traffic; jury; criminal records; and our 1st floor courtroom with a 6-person jury box and Judicial Chambers for our other circuit judge.

Posts are very inconveniently located in our courtrooms. Judges and litigants struggle to maintain decorum as they maneuver in and around posts to effectively try cases. There are seats in the gallery where it is impossible to see if a person is seated there or not. To avoid eye contact with the judge those spots are the first to fill up. We are only able to provide security at one entrance out of four into of our facility. We have many major security concerns, judges and court staff are not comfortable here. Images #3-#8 show various vantage points around our building and from within that we hope depict the maze of access point.

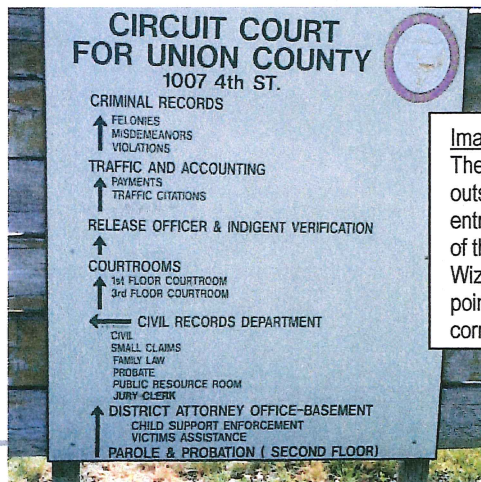


Image #3 **Image #4**
 These signs are posted outside of our two entrances. It reminds me of the scarecrow on Wizard of Oz trying to point to which direction is correct.

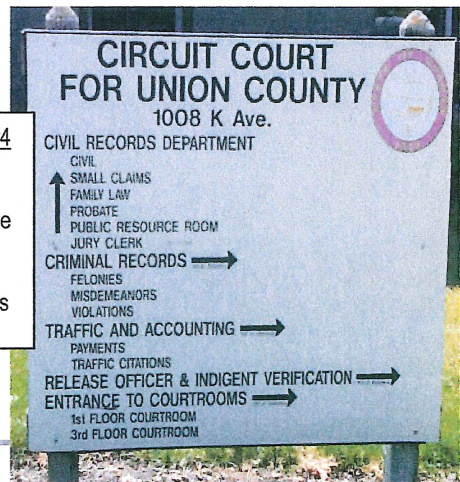




Image #5
 This area is the main entrance. This is all the space we have for a public entrance to two courtrooms and another county agency. There isn't any waiting area for the 1st floor courtroom. During trials this main entry is cluttered with people sitting on the floor. On heavy docket days people are backed up with only a few feet available while waiting to go through the metal detector. It is highly congested; our staff has difficulty getting to their assigned offices when the traffic is high. There are three circuit court office doors and the bathroom doors all in this very small space.



Image 5a- Civil Records customers enter the building at a different 1st floor location. They find closed off windows and doors. No front line security of any kind. They then must proceed to the 3rd floor for service. These customers are sometimes the most emotional charged about custody and civil disputes.



Image #7
 This is the Jury vantage point for our 1st floor courtroom. There is a person sitting at counsel table behind the post.



Image #6
 Judge's Vantage from 1st floor bench. Court patrons are notorious for sitting behind a post to escape the eyes of a judge. It is the most worn seat in the house.



Image #8. This vantage point is from the jury box on the 3rd floor. They have difficulty seeing litigants.

We are not only worst facility on the 2008 Hennebery Eddy Architects Court Facility assessment report, the scale had to be extended down just to record our rating, see graph attached. Here, I added other photos of our building that probably resemble many photos taken of facilities around the State, images #12 - #14. These are very familiar sights in our state's courthouses.



Image #12 Image #13
These two are of an employee restroom.

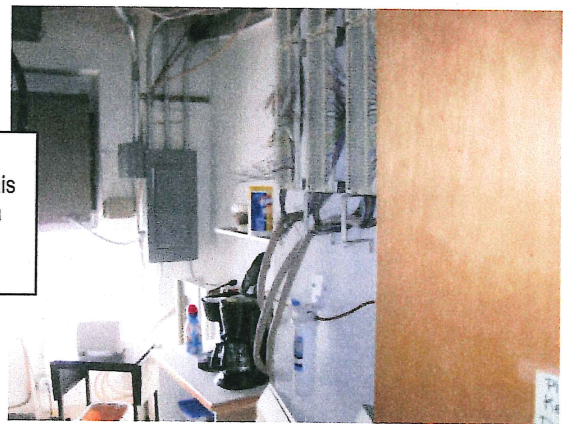


Image #14
I think with the coffee maker in this machine room, it constitutes as a break room. At least it's the closest thing we have.

In preparation for making appropriation requests, in 2009 we applied and received a State Justice Institute Grant for \$30,000 to conduct a site survey for a new facility. This we felt, would put us ahead of others who might not be far enough along in their facility planning. The 11.2 million under HB 5854 appropriation funding went to other court facilities that weren't ranked as low as ours. Recently, our County Commissioners began a project in hopes of helping us get shovel ready when more funding options become available and have spent a good sum of money to study and prepare for an addition to an existing building. In 2011 Judge West, Commissioner Rosholt and Representative Greg Smith spent considerable amount of time making sure the seven members of the Joint Advisory Committee on State Court Facilities were informed about our progress, needs, and our plans. This funding option was swept.

Security of our staff, judges and public is our biggest concern. While litigants must maneuver around posts and poor seating situation in the courtroom, our biggest issue that we face is a major compromise of security when inmates, to protect their rights, are not to be seen by jurors being unshackled, they must be brought through secured staff areas. They are unshackled directly outside the presiding judge's chambers. The judge must wait to get to his JA during this process. The prisoner during trial is brought back and forth on this route and

uses a staff restroom to keep from mingling with jurors and witnesses (images #9 thru #11 to follow).



Image #9

Image #10

I took these photos of an inmate being brought to court by multiple deputies in riot gear. This defendant had murdered three people and dismembered one of them. Both images #9 & #10 are directly outside of the Presiding Judge's chambers. They are getting the defendant ready to go into court.

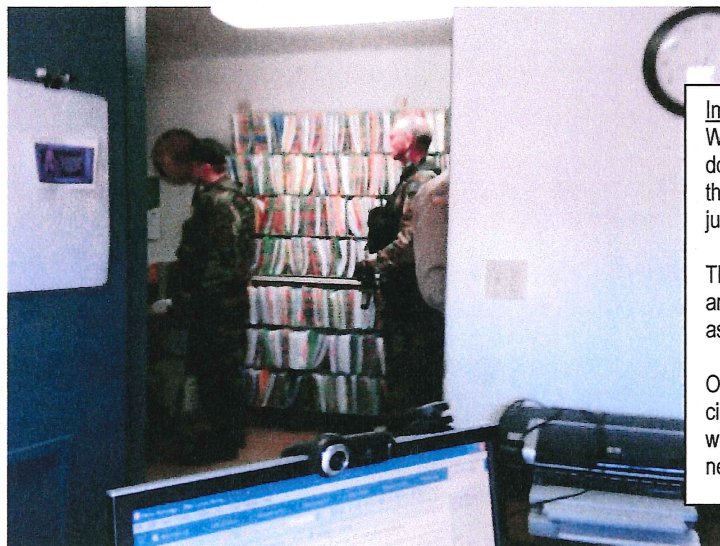
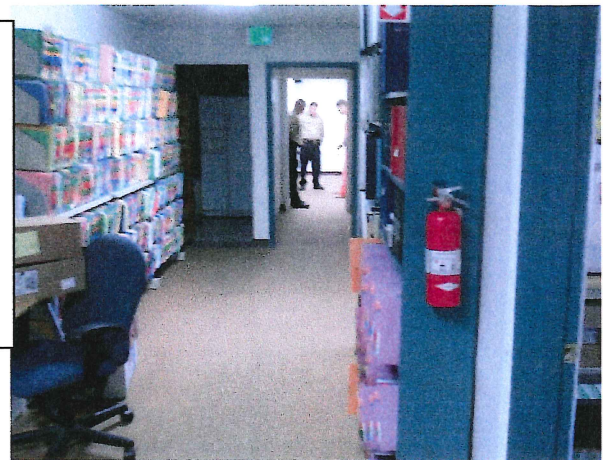


Image #11

We don't have a lot of murderers here, but we do have a lot of defendant's in custody, and they ALL come through secured staff and judge areas.

This is from my office on that day; I hope you are able to see that officers are brandishing assault rifles.

Our staff does not feel safe under these circumstances. I think these photos sum up where fire sprinklers might land on our list of needs.

Our project to improve door locks and security cameras, a project lead by Larry Raff and his crew proved to be an extreme challenge. We only have 12 employees and two judges in total, but the number of doors that we needed secured outnumbered our staff due to layout of our offices. Due to the poured concrete construction of the structure, we would never be able to remodel to suit.

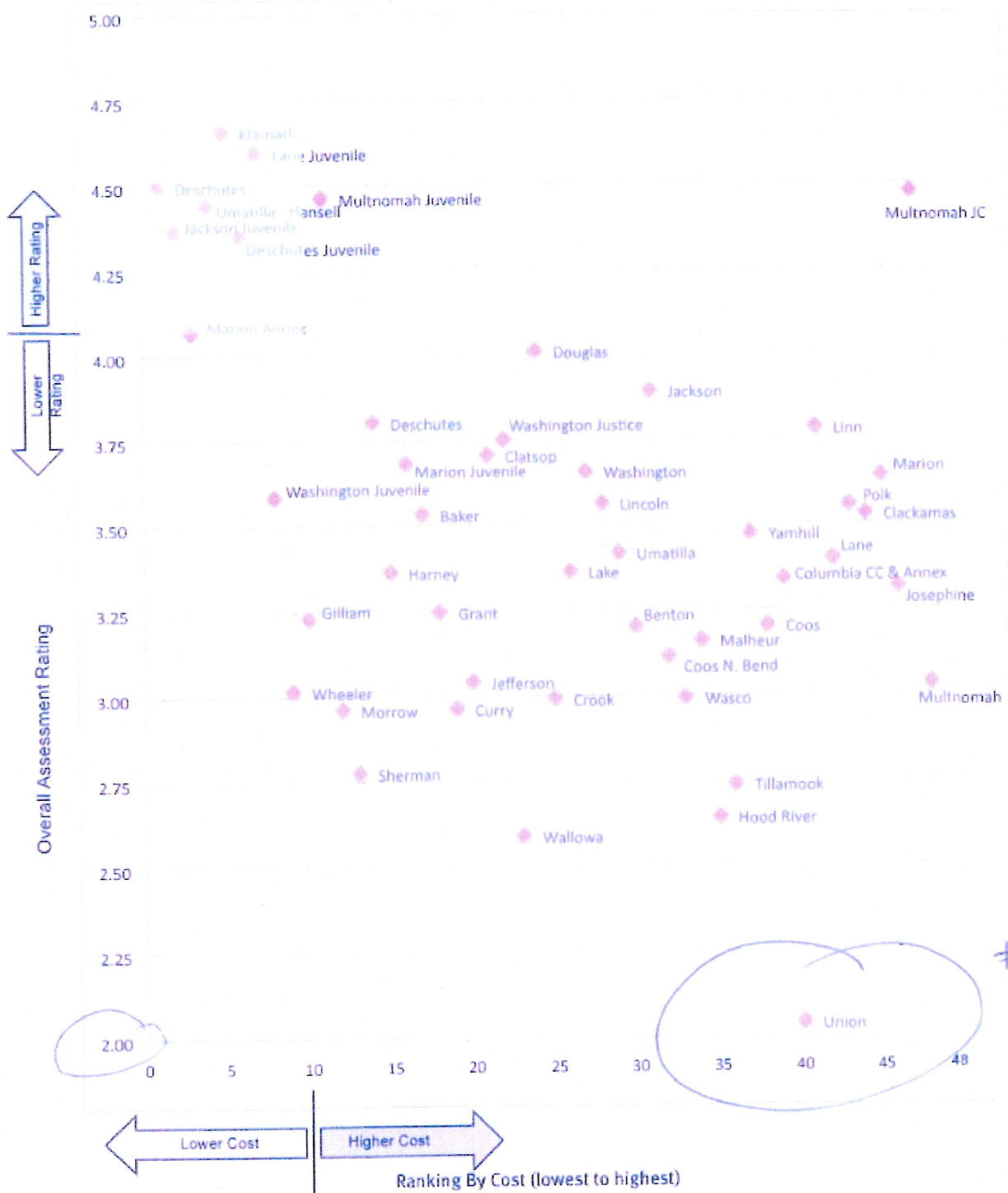
We have not had a courthouse for 21 years. We have been passed over more than once for funding. \$11.27 million of stimulus dollars were given to other court facilities a couple years ago and we received absolutely nothing.

HB 2712 finally gave us hope that we had a chance for some funds with the new facility funding in place. We were stunned that the first suggested allocation of 2.3 million dollars was to be spent on sprinkler systems in courthouses that didn't even ask for sprinkler systems. We were advised that the recommendation was safety driven, but the photos we have provided here are of what we consider the real safety issue for our courts. A serial killer, who dismembered a body, is shown being protected by the Sheriff's department as he is transported into the courtroom. This area is directly situated outside

of the Presiding Judge's office, at his assistant's desk. I think it is clear why we would not consider sprinkler systems to be a safety concern in this district, or even in our top ten needs.

The HB 2712 facility fund was a very real need and we were saddened when the funds were not made available to us, or any court facility.

Scatter Graph B
Individual Facilities: Total Cost Ranking vs. Overall Assessment Rating



This is a page from the 2008 Facility Study, it shows our rating in a category of its own. It almost looks like they had to extend it just so we would have a place.