



# JACKSON COUNTY

Oregon

## Administrator's Office

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May 24, 2022

Senator Jeff Golden  
900 Court Street NE S-421  
Salem OR 97301  
[Sen.JeffGolden@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Sen.JeffGolden@oregonlegislature.gov)

RE: Jackson County's Cannabis Enforcement Progress and Development for 2021-2022

Dear Senator Golden:

Jackson County had a very challenging year in 2021 with regard to illegal cannabis production. We saw very blatant and open cultivation on large swaths of land in plain view of the public. The amount of illegal cannabis grows were so pervasive, it is impossible to document the magnitude of the problem.

The Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District contracted out an independent study to be conducted regarding water usage in the valley due to cannabis cultivation. While conducting the evaluation, the author found approximately 950 mapped grows in a relatively small area (about 160 square miles). The author was able to conclude that 780 of the grows found, which were required to have licensing, were in fact illegal. This study occurred in Josephine County; however, the issues in Jackson County are similar and it provides a little perspective to the size of the issue.

In 2021, Jackson County was able to track about 500 different locations that we had complaints about, but could not follow up on due to the sheer amount of work required to do so. It is thought that if we had another 60 deputies, working full-time, we still would not have been able to address the amount of complaints received last year.

The illegal cannabis cultivation has caused issues related to water usage, labor trafficking, environmental impacts, crime associated with the marijuana cultivation industry, road use issues, code enforcement issues, and it has impacted the livability of our County immensely. There are many issues that still need corrected within the marijuana and hemp industries. The work done by our State Representatives and Senators, State regulatory agencies, local government, and law enforcement have closed loopholes, removed the stigma that it is okay to cultivate marijuana without any risk, and have increased grant opportunities to increase enforcement capability.

At the end of 2021, funding was authorized during an emergency legislative session to bolster law enforcement, which is really the weakest link in addressing illegal cannabis cultivation due to the potential dangers and crime associated with illegal grows. However, code enforcement and water issues also bring many other harms that affect the health, safety, and welfare of Jackson County citizens, and require action.

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Jackson County originally requested approximately \$7,000,000 per year from the legislature in order to address code enforcement issues, law enforcement issues, and prosecution. We made it clear that one year of funding, with no future guarantee of authorization, would not allow us to properly address the concerns. One year of funding makes it virtually impossible to hire staff as very few, if any, potential employees will come to work knowing they only have one year of job security.

As of May 23, 2022, ZERO funding has been awarded to Jackson County. We are told that when the funding is allocated, it is only a one-time authorization that can be used through December 2025. Based on this information, we increased our total request and scaled back the service level to fit the timeline, knowing that it will only cover 33 percent of our projected needs. Subsequently, we were told that our request needed to be scaled back by an additional 30 percent, from about \$11,000,000 to approximately \$7,000,000; therefore, service levels will need to be further reduced.

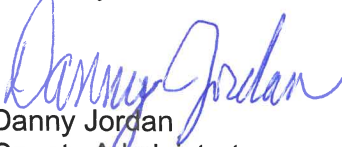
Due to the attention that has been generated in the press, etc., we believe there will be a reduction in illegal cannabis grows this year regardless, if the trend we are currently seeing holds fast. We also believe there have been some shifts in tactics in how the marijuana is being cultivated; specifically, we are hearing about marijuana grows being moved indoors or to other locations within the State. While cultivation is the biggest issue, others include shipping, delivery, illegally-run labs (which are prone to explosions and fire), money laundering and tax evasion, code enforcement, water use, and other livability issues.

Issues that still must be addressed include the following:

1. Finding sustained funding for this grant for up to 10 years to ensure the problems with illegal cannabis are eradicated and do not return to Jackson County, and Oregon in general.
2. Re-establishing base level funding to local governments, which was lost due to Ballot Measure 110, to reduce dependence on State grants to fight the problems.
3. Funding on the regulatory side to ensure locations that are licensed follow State laws, and are not conducting black market operations.
4. Further law changes are needed to ensure offenders are held accountable, and the current drug laws in Oregon need to be re-evaluated.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter in Jackson County.

Sincerely,

  
Danny Jordan  
County Administrator

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By: Email Only