

Eastern Oregon Jail Renovation Testimony to Ways and Means

April 17, 2021

George Murdock, Chair

Umatilla County Board of Commissioners

Fiscal Request

\$2.085 Million

Introduction

Regionalization is a concept that has been growing in popularity and necessity at the state and local level in recent years. And, no area of Oregon understands the importance of advancing that concept better than Eastern Oregon.

Challenged by distance, isolation, a lack of alternatives, population, and a narrow list of alternatives, Eastern Oregon counties have had to turn to one another for help. As counties – particularly Oregon’s smallest – face mounting costs and limited revenues, regionalization is the face of the future.

One exceptional example of regionalization is the Umatilla County Jail that houses inmates from Wallowa, Union, Umatilla, and Morrow Counties. The jail also holds offenders from the Umatilla Tribes and U. S. Marshals and serves as a transport and transfer hub for many other correction facilities in several western states. While the jail has a broad footprint serving the region, state, and even beyond, the obligation for the services it provides have had to be borne by a single county.

A second major burden has come as the result of the closure of the Blue Mountain Recovery Center without any significant program mitigation although it had been promised. It is this lack of mitigation which sets the jail renovation program apart in terms of potential support from the State.

Just two decades ago, the jail housed a maximum of 80 inmates. After the construction of a new jail, the capacity grew to 169 inmates with a daily population of about 100 to 125. Double bunks were added to increase the capacity to 252 beds although with the need to separate different classes of inmates, a number of inmates are often sleeping on the floor of rooms that were designed for day use. At the present time, the average daily population of the jail is about 235.

What Will Be Accomplished:

- With renovation, the jail will be better positioned to handle an increasingly volatile population, a growing number of inmates with mental health issues, those suffering from drug and alcohol addictions, and transgender or gender confused inmates.
- Renovation will provide the capacity to address counseling, mental health treatment, drug and alcohol addiction, and other social services.
- Renovation will enhance the ability of the jail to serve its regional function in terms of transport, transportation, and other services that place undue demands on processing capacity.

- With the closure of the Blue Mountain Recovery Center, the jail has become an unfortunate solution to helping handle mental health patients in crisis situations. While not an ideal solution, in rural Oregon, ideal is not always a possibility.
- With the goals of the State to divert individuals from the Oregon State Hospital and the Department of Corrections significant demands have been placed on local facilities such as the jail. State assistance in addressing the renovation project would directly contribute to meeting those state objectives as a cost-effective alternative that has benefits at the state level.
- The requested renovations will contribute to higher levels of safety for the public, staff, and inmates.
- Renovation will make the jail viable for many decades into the future.

History

I am here to talk about our \$2.1 million jail renovation project which serves Northeast Oregon.

I am aware your co-chairs, Senators John and Steiner-Hayward, visited in Pendleton about this project and this is a matter near and dear to the heart of Speaker Kotek because of the work of the late Rep. Bob Jensen.

The project was already approved through the sale of lottery bonds but COVID took care of that. In the meantime, we invested \$250,000 in design and development activities which have already been completed. We are shovel ready.

Thank you for your time,
George Murdock, Chair
Umatilla County Board of Commissioners