

ANALYSIS

Item 17: Oregon Youth Authority Professional Standards Collaboration

Analyst: Steve Robbins

Request: Acknowledge receipt of a report on collaboration efforts between the Oregon Youth Authority, Oregon State Police, and Department of Human Services relating to cases assigned to the Professional Standards Office.

Analysis: The Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) Professional Standards Office (PSO) exists to investigate allegations of abuse, neglect, and inappropriate behavior by OYA employees. The agency maintains a toll-free reporting line and can also field concerns from youth in custody, family members, or other staff in person or in writing.

In December 2024, a combination of legal action from youth in custody and internal tracking indicated a growing backlog of PSO cases. In response, OYA requested a peer review of the PSO by the Department of Corrections, initiated on January 6, 2025, which revealed 733 aged cases (over 180 days old) and 3,242 cases still awaiting final review. Due to the collaboration required on PSO cases between OYA, the Oregon State Police (OSP) and the Department of Human Services' Office of Training, Investigations and Safety (OTIS) on these often-complex cases, one of the concerns raised in the aftermath of the review was that partner agencies did not appear to play a role in identifying the significant backlog as an issue.

With the goal of formalizing interagency collaboration, the following budget note was included with HB 5006 (2025) for the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) to submit a report clarifying roles and establishing the importance that all parties play in identifying process concerns:

The Oregon Youth Authority shall convene a work group in coordination with the Department of State Police and the Department of Human Services to review rules and procedures relating to processing cases assigned to the Professional Standards Office. The Oregon Youth Authority shall submit a written report of recommendations to the Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means no later than December 31, 2025.

The submitted report includes background, how coordination has traditionally been structured between partner agencies, the work being done in collaboration to reduce the existing PSO case backlog, and steps being taken to avoid future process issues.

Recommendation: The Legislative Fiscal Office recommends that the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means acknowledge receipt of the report.

Request: Report on recommendations from the joint workgroup between the Oregon Youth Authority, Oregon State Police, and the Oregon Department of Human Services in reviewing rules and procedures related to processing cases assigned to the Professional Standards Office.

Recommendation: Acknowledge receipt of the report.

Discussion: The 2025 Legislature passed House Bill 5006 accompanied by a budget note directing the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) to review rules and procedures for processing cases within the Professional Standards Office (PSO) in coordination with Oregon State Police (OSP) and the Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Training, Investigations, and Safety (OTIS). Although the legislature envisioned a workgroup, OYA completed most of the review before the budget passed and instead prepared a comprehensive report with input from OSP and DHS. This directive stemmed from serious concerns raised in December 2024 regarding PSO's ability to effectively manage investigations, prompting a peer review by the Department of Corrections in early January 2025. That review uncovered systemic failures, including 733 aged cases and over 3,200 cases awaiting final review, leading to immediate leadership changes and the appointment of an interim chief investigator.

Subsequent to the interim chief investigator appointment, OYA strengthened collaboration with partner agencies, established frequent communication with OSP and OTIS, and implemented monthly joint reviews of case tracking spreadsheets. OTIS provided support to OYA by loaning staff to address backlogged cases and temporarily assigning a manager to OYA. In October, OYA hired a former OTIS manager as deputy chief investigator. Additionally, OYA began sending monthly reports to OTIS and included both partner agencies in its Safety Advisory Committee, allowing for broader system-level collaboration.

To address systemic weaknesses, OYA launched a PSO improvement plan in February 2025. This plan prioritized timely, high-quality investigations, enhanced supervision, improved training, and clearer data systems. Policies were revised to require follow-ups every 60 days on cases referred to law enforcement, and procedures clarified staff responsibilities. Weekly data reports now provide transparency to internal stakeholders, legislators, and external partners. Looking ahead, OYA is hiring a permanent chief investigator and refining its performance management processes, starting with PSO. These efforts are intended to ensure accountability, strengthen partnerships, and invite public critique to maintain trust and improve investigative integrity.



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

12/31/2025

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The Honorable Senator Kate Lieber, Co-Chair
The Honorable Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court Street NE
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Salem, OR 97301-4048

Dear Co-Chairs, Senator Lieber and Representative Sanchez,

Nature of the Request – Replacement Letter

The Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) respectfully asks the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means to acknowledge receipt of a report on the collaborative work of OYA, Department of State Police, and the Department of Human Services to review rules and procedures relating to processing cases assigned to the OYA Professional Standards Office (PSO). The Oregon Youth Authority was asked in the Budget Note contained in House Bill HB 5006A (2025) to submit a written report to the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means by December 31, 2025. The agency is on track to meet the reporting deadline and has made significant strides in transparency, accountability, and interagency collaboration.

HB 5006 Budget Note

The Oregon Youth Authority shall convene a workgroup in coordination with the Department of State Police and the Department of Human Services to review rules and procedures relating to processing cases assigned to the Professional Standards Office. The Oregon Youth Authority shall submit a written report of recommendations to the Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means no later than December 31, 2025.

Status Update: HB 5006 Budget Note – Professional Standards Office

OYA collaborated with the Department of State Police (OSP) and the Oregon Department of Human Services – Office of Training, Investigations, and Safety (OTIS) to review PSO case processing procedures, as directed by the 2025 HB 5006 Budget Note. A formal report with recommendations is being submitted with this letter as required.

Key Progress Highlights:

- Interagency Coordination:** OYA re-established regular communication with OSP and OTIS. Monthly case tracking and reporting are now in place, including updates to local DAs.
- Policy Updates:** PSO policies now require 60-day follow-ups on referred cases. Staff responsibilities and procedures have been clarified.

- **Collaboration:** OTIS has provided staff support and leadership expertise. Both OSP and OTIS are active members of the Safety Advisory Committee.
- **Further Actions:** No legislative changes are proposed. Internal actions include onboarding protocols for the new Chief Investigator and continued performance management improvements.

Action Requested

The agency is requesting acknowledgement of the report.

Respectfully,



Mike Tessman
Director

cc: Kate Nass, Chief Financial Officer
Amanda Beitel, Legislative Fiscal Officer
Allison Daniel, CFO Policy and Budget Analyst
Steve Robbins, LFO Principal Legislative Analyst
Renee Klein, OYA Assistant Director of Business Services
Deborah Martin, OYA Interim Government Relations Manager

The 2025 HB 5006 Budget Note – Professional Standards Office

In HB 5006, passed during the regular 2025 session, the legislature directed:

The Oregon Youth Authority [OYA] shall convene a workgroup in coordination with the Department of State Police [OSP] and the Department of Human Services [ODHS] to review rules and procedures relating to processing cases assigned to the Professional Standards Office. The Oregon Youth Authority shall submit a written report of recommendations to the Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means no later than December 31, 2025.

By the time the budget passed, the vast majority of the review work had been completed by OYA in partnership with OSP and ODHS. For this reason, OYA did not convene an official workgroup, but did prepare this summary of the work with review by OSP and ODHS.

This report covers:

1. The background and context for the legislature's directive
2. Past coordination between OYA and partner agencies
3. Current collaboration with partner agencies
4. New policies and procedures
5. Future action

Background and Context

In December 2024, routine weekly reports raised concerns about PSO's ability to keep pace with investigations. This caused then-interim deputy director Jana McLellan to request a peer review by the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC). Ken Jeske (then-Westside Institutions administrator and former PSO chief investigator) and Toby Tooley (DOC Oregon Way administrator) began their review of PSO's operations on January 6, 2025. The review showed broken systems meant to ensure investigations:

- proceeded expeditiously and thoroughly
- were tracked and analyzed
- meaningfully included key partners such as OYA's Human Resources division, OSP, and ODHS's Office of Training, Investigations and Safety (OTIS)

At the time of the peer review, Jeske and Tooley found 733 aged cases (open and suspended cases over 180 days old) and 3,242 cases awaiting final review by the chief investigator. It was also uncovered that the cases suspended by PSO and referred to OSP and OTIS were not being followed up on by PSO. While there were routine meetings between PSO and OSP, most suspended cases were not on the tracking sheet that PSO provided to OSP. These discoveries led to immediate leadership change in PSO, with Jeske becoming interim chief investigator.

Jeske immediately started connecting regularly with OSP and OTIS leadership upon his arrival. By February, he had re-established working partnerships with OSP, which included regular communication – sometimes daily for case processing, and a minimum of monthly – to review current cases. OTIS jumped in, too, within days of the leadership change at PSO. OTIS loaned three staff to assist with all aged cases – not just those that involved OTIS – and made sure current cases did not fall behind. An OTIS manager was also temporarily assigned to OYA half time.

Jeske and OYA leadership developed a process improvement plan based upon the findings in the peer review, to address the aged cases and make sure PSO functions at a high level. The plan includes 110 items, of which 91% are complete; 10 items remain in progress, such as

- finishing the aged cases
- completing an external audit (began 12/9/25)
- finalizing the transition to a new case management system

Past coordination between agencies

Prior to 2025, OYA policy I-D-4.0 and the related procedure required PSO to have regular contact with both OSP and OTIS. This coordination was and remains necessary because OSP investigates all allegations of criminal conduct in OYA facilities, and OTIS investigates all accusations of child abuse in a community setting in conjunction with local law enforcement. When OYA sends a case to OSP or OTIS for investigation, we suspend the case within our system pending them completing their investigation. PSO investigators must then follow up so our administrative investigation can be completed and closed with the results OSP or OTIS found incorporated.

Current collaboration with partner agencies

Communication between the PSO chief investigator and OSP now happen more often than policy requires, and there is discussion about what is working and what procedures need improvement. Additionally, a spreadsheet with cases referred to OSP is jointly

reviewed monthly to ensure that both entities are tracking all cases. The same information is now also sent to the local district attorney for each OYA facility so they can update PSO on pending criminal charges stemming from PSO reports.

Representatives from both OSP and OTIS join many other important partners on OYA's Safety Advisory Committee (established in May 2025). Their participation supports transparency and collaboration with agency leaders and other system partners, not just PSO. The committee concluded their initial work in October 2025 and will reconvene in January 2026. While the representation on that committee may change based on the focus of the committee, OSP and OTIS will remain important partners.

New policies and procedures

As noted earlier, since February, the agency has been guided by a PSO improvement plan. That plan includes specific work to improve reporting systems and verify that quality investigations are being done in a timely fashion. It also sets goals for stronger supervision, better-trained investigators, clearer data systems, and closer coordination with law enforcement and child welfare partners.

One key goal was to revise the policies surrounding the Professional Standards Office. Representatives from both OSP and OTIS participated in the review and revision. With their support and feedback, the policy now requires PSO to follow-up at least every 60 days on cases that are referred to law enforcement. A related procedure was recently updated to clearly articulate PSO staff expectations, such as follow-up practices, related to cases referred to OSP and OTIS. The standards direct staff to follow set timelines for following up when a case has been referred to OSP or OTIS. The new policy has been approved by OYA's policy committee and will be released in January 2026.

The OYA Research and Evaluation unit compiles data weekly to share internally and with external partners, including legislators on the Public Safety subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means. OSP and OTIS also receive this weekly data. The data on suspended cases is included, which provides additional transparency and accountability if there is a buildup of suspended cases. Additionally, the PSO chief investigator meets quarterly with the public safety advisor from the Governor's Office to review data, share progress, and inform them of any agency concerns.

Future actions

At the time of this report, OYA is currently onboarding a permanent chief investigator to take over for Jeske. During the onboarding, Jeske will connect the new chief

investigator to OSP and OTIS, reinforce policy and expectations, and lay the foundation for a strong working relationship. The new chief will take over Jeske's regular communication and monthly meetings, and the office will continue to share data, collaborate on investigations and provide mutual support.

In October, OYA hired a former OTIS policy advisor as PSO's deputy chief investigator. The knowledge the deputy chief brings from her prior role at OTIS is valuable to our partnership and collaboration. OYA and OTIS leadership have agreed to and are finalizing a process to send a monthly report of any cases PSO referred to OTIS so that no case slips through the cracks. The deputy chief investigator is establishing a monthly meeting with OTIS leadership to ensure clear communication and cross reporting between the two agencies.

OYA is also refining its performance management process agencywide, and the first office to participate was PSO. Their presentation included (and will continue to include as we refine the process) a review of data on cases suspended and referred to OSP and OTIS. The new process provides greater transparency and accountability to ensure PSO policies are being followed. As the process develops, OYA intends to invite system partners.

Summary

Several of the new processes provide increased collaboration with system partners such as the Governor's Office, OSP, and OTIS. All the processes allow the partner agencies to take note of potential warning signs and ask questions about PSO systems, policies, or data. The opportunities for the partner agencies to engage include:

- meeting at least every 60 days with PSO, OSP and OTIS to review suspended cases
- meeting with the PSO chief investigator and the governor's office quarterly
- review PSO data weekly
- participate in the PSO performance management process to review all PSO data

In January 2025, there were a total of 308 cases open or suspended (most of which were longer than 6 months) to either OSP or OTIS. As of 12/24/2025, only 6 cases had been suspended to OSP or OTIS longer than 6 months. More broadly, by the time this report was finalized, PSO had reduced the total number of cases open or suspended longer than 6 months by 92%.