

ANALYSIS

Oregon Youth Authority Professional Standards Office

Analyst: Steve Robbins

Request: Acknowledge receipt of a report updating the status of the Oregon Youth Authority Professional Standards Office caseload.

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 in person or in writing from youth in custody, family members, or other staff.

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 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.

The following budget note was included in HB 5041 (2025), the primary budget bill for OYA, requesting updates on the progress being made:

The Oregon Youth Authority shall report to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means during the 2025 legislative session, the September 2026 legislative days, and the 2027 legislative session on the progress made in addressing reported cases and Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) investigations for the agency. The report should include statistics on any case backlog that still exists, the amount of time it takes from when a case is reported to when it is investigated, the number of open cases and their status, and how investments made by the 2025 Legislature impact case resolution.

The submitted report indicates significant progress toward addressing the issues. The number of cases older than six months totals 28, a 96% reduction from a year earlier. The number of cases closed by an investigator and awaiting chief investigator review has been reduced by 12.5% in the past year and will be a focus item in 2026. Other information provided includes the status of other cases, the agency's commitment to better communication, and a refocus on policy and procedures. New positions established by the Legislature have been hired and are major contributors to the improvements currently underway.

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

Request: Report on the progress made in addressing cases and the Prison Rape Elimination Act investigations made to the Professional Standards Office by the Oregon Youth Authority.

Recommendation: Acknowledge receipt of the report.

Discussion: In a budget note related to House Bill 5041 (2025), the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) was directed to report on the progress made in addressing cases and the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) investigations, during the 2026 legislative session, September 2026 legislative days, and the 2027 legislative session. The report is to include statistics on the remaining case backlog, the duration between the time a case is reported and when it is investigated, the number of open cases and their status, and how investments made by the 2025 Legislature impacted case resolution.

The mission of OYA's Professional Standards Office (PSO) is to help eliminate organizational conditions that foster, permit, or encourage inappropriate behavior by OYA employees. Following a January 2025 peer review of PSO's processes for handling reports and investigations, OYA pinpointed several items needing attention:

- Over 730 opened and suspended cases were more than 180 days old, in direct violation of agency policies.
- Over 3,200 cases closed by an investigator still awaited final review.
- Cases suspended by PSO and referred to one of OYA's partner agencies (either the Oregon State Police or the Oregon Department of Human Services Office of Training, Investigations and Safety) were not being followed up on by PSO staff.

As a result, OYA implemented an immediate leadership change within PSO and sought to revisit internal policies and processes, refocus staff, and prioritize aged cases.

Outcomes of PSO's work since January 2025 include:

- A 96 percent reduction in the number of cases aged more than six months;
- An approximate 13 percent reduction in the number of closed cases awaiting final review;
- Maintaining progress on aged cases while handling newly reported cases;
- Clarifying staff procedures and responsibilities to provide internal responses and case follow-up with partner agencies; and
- Providing weekly updates to members of the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety and both Interim Judiciary Committees, as well as county partners and OYA's Safety Advisory Committee.

While staff time focused on both new and aged cases in 2025, OYA intends to continue utilizing the six PSO positions authorized by the 2025 Legislature to concentrate on existing unsigned cases awaiting final review in 2026.



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

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January 16, 2026

The Honorable Senator Kate Lieber, Co-Chair
The Honorable Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court Street NE, H-178
Salem, OR 97301-4048

Dear Co-Chairs, Senator Lieber and Representative Sanchez,

Nature of the Request

The Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) respectfully submits information to provide an update on the work of the Professional Standards Office (PSO) and the impact of the resources allocated to the agency as requested as part of the 2025 legislatively adopted budget. OYA was required in a budget note contained in House Bill 5041 (2025) to report during the 2026 legislative session. The agency looks forward to providing information about the significant strides in transparency, accountability, and progress of PSO.

HB 5041 Budget Note

The Oregon Youth Authority shall report to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means during the 2026 legislative session, the September 2026 legislative days, and the 2027 legislative session on the progress made in addressing reported cases and prison rape elimination act (PREA) investigations for the agency. The report should include statistics on any case backlog that still exists, the amount of time it takes from when a case is reported to when it is investigated, the number of open cases and their status, and how investments made by the 2025 Legislature impacted case resolution.

The agency looks forward to testifying during the 2026 short session about our progress on aged cases, as well as steps we have taken to ensure the agency operates with utmost transparency and accountability.

Agency Action

Background:

This journey began after a January 2025 process review found significant issues in how the PSO was handling reports and investigations. 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, Oregon State Police (OSP), and the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) Office of Training, Investigations and Safety (OTIS)

The peer review was conducted by investigators on loan from the Department of Corrections, and these individuals identified 733 cases that had been open or suspended and were over 180 days old, which was and is a violation of OYA policies. Additionally, 3,242 cases had been closed by an investigator but awaited 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.

These discoveries led to immediate leadership change in PSO and months of work to rebuild process, revisit policies, refocus staff, and revisit these aged cases. This work necessarily bought some temporary increases in expenses, which were generously supported during the 2025 legislative session.

Key Progress Highlights:

- **Aged Cases:** As of January 14, 2026, only 28 cases are older than six months, which is a 96% reduction from January 2025. Three of these cases are suspended to OSP, and one is suspended to OTIS.
- **Unsigned Cases:** In January 2025, there were over 3,200 cases that had been closed by an investigator and await final review by the Chief Investigator. There are currently just over 2,800 cases. Our staff time and primary focus has been on aged cases and new cases coming in. We are positioned to concentrate on this area in 2026, with the addition of a deputy chief investigator, new permanent chief investigator, and some additional time from the retired chief investigator.
- **Status of Other Cases:** In addition to these aged cases, as of January 14, 2026, we have a total of 60 other cases; 10 of those cases are currently suspended to either OSP or OTIS.
- **Keeping Up with Current Work:** Following a year-long campaign to encourage youth, staff, families, and partners to report concerns, PSO had an increase in the number of complaints received in 2025. They handled all incoming work while still reducing the number of aged cases.
- **Clear timelines for following up:** PSO policies establish timelines for internal responses and investigations as well as 60-day follow-ups on cases referred to OSP and OTIS. Staff responsibilities and procedures have been clarified.
- **Commitment to Transparency and Accountability:** Progress updates have been shared weekly with all members of the Public Safety Subcommittee and the Judiciary Committee, as well as county partners and members of our Safety Advisory Committee. This committee has been convened and chaired by our Youth and Family Advocate.

Impact of investments on case resolution:

None of this progress would have been possible without the six positions authorized by the Legislature, these positions include:

- Two investigators
- Screener
- Human resources analyst
- Deputy chief investigator, and

- Youth and family advocate.

All six authorized positions were hired, although the screener position was hired and then vacated. We are currently on the tail end of the hiring process to fill that position. We look forward to providing more specifics about how each role has contributed to addressing aged cases, improving PSO operations, and fostering greater accountability for OYA.

Action Requested

OYA requests acknowledgement of this report.

Legislation Affected

None.

Respectfully,



Mike Tessean
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
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