

Corrections Briefings

November/December 1999

Volume 2, Issue 5

Voters Approve Measure 68

Oregon Corrections Enterprises is Born

By Dave Cook, Director

On November 2nd, the people of the State of Oregon passed Ballot Measure 68, a constitutional amendment to Measure 17. The Department of Corrections has been considering the ramifications of the initiative since it was placed on the ballot as well as the companion legislation, HB 2488. I thought you might be interested in some of the its anticipated effects on the Department of Corrections.

Business-Like Mandate

As you know, Measure 17 was intended to put most state inmates to work and to allow the Department of Corrections to run its prison work programs in a business-like fashion. However, that same measure placed many unanticipated road blocks in the department's way such as lengthy contracting and purchasing procedures. Under Measure 68, the director of the Department of Corrections has sole authority to approve expenditures and private enterprise agreements. This change alone will allow prison work programs to operate in a more business-like fashion.

Consideration of Competition

Under Measure 17, the department could not consider competition when establishing or expanding inmate work programs. The department was placed in a difficult position as a result. Measure 68 says the director may consider competition; to the extent possible, the director will avoid displacing private employees, including the developmentally disabled. However, the determination to enter into or expand a business remains at the sole discretion of the director.

Helping Our Communities

Inmate labor has long been available to public agencies and private enterprises for a fee. We may now put inmates to work for the benefit of the community and to support community charitable organizations. This will allow us to contribute to our communities in a positive way.

Oregon Corrections Enterprises

As I mentioned above, HB 2488 goes into effect because of the passage of Measure 68. On December 2, 1999, HB 2488 (1999 Or Laws, Chapter 955) creates a semi-independent state agency, Oregon Corrections Enterprises (OCE), to engage inmates in work and/or on-the-job training. OCE will operate work programs that are cost-effective and designed to ultimately return skilled, motivated and cooperative workers to the community.

This new agency is not a private corporation or private entity of any kind. The term "semi-independent" indicates that this particular state agency is freed from a lot of cumbersome state regulations. Again, this is the key to operating in a business-like fashion.

OREGON DEPARTMENT
OF CORRECTIONS

DAVID S. COOK
DIRECTOR

The mission of the Oregon Department of Corrections is to promote public safety by holding offenders accountable for their actions and reducing the risk of future criminal behavior.

JOHN A. KITZHABER, M.D.
GOVERNOR



Other features of OCE:

- The director of the Department of Corrections bears ultimate responsibility for OCE and for practical purposes is its chief executive officer.
- OCE will be able to enter into agreements with public, private, government, nonprofit or for-profit persons or entities to engage inmates in work.
- OCE will be exempt from public records disclosure for certain types of business records.
- Income and revenue generated will be plugged back into OCE.
- OCE is required to report annually on its activities and operations to the governor as well as the Legislative Assembly.
- An OCE advisory council is to be created and it will include members from banking, organized labor and private business.
- OCE's administrator is appointed by and shall serve at the pleasure of the director of the Department of Corrections.

Employees Grandfathered

All employees of Inmate Work Programs as of December 1, will be offered continuation of employment with OCE. The terms and conditions of employment shall be determined by the administrator. Employees choosing to accept employment with OCE will retain their current work assignment as well as salary and benefits. These will remain in effect until such time as OCE human resource policies are issued and adopted by OCE. A new compensation proposal is currently being drafted and will be distributed to OCE employees for consideration and input prior to adoption. New employees of OCE will not be eligible for P&F status, however. Employees who may become

represented for collective bargaining must be represented by a bargaining unit comprised exclusively of OCE employees. The administrator also has authority to employ other personnel as deemed necessary to carry out the agency's mission.

DOC Support Offered

It is my wish that this transition proceed smoothly with as few changes as possible. In light of that goal, the department will need to assist OCE during a transition period to help it become self-supporting. For example, the department will offer the support of Human Resources, ISSD, Budget and Institutions (to name a few) as long as OCE needs it.

I hope I have answered some of the questions you may have. As always, Michael Taaffe, Inmate Work Programs administrator, Deputy Director Ben de Haan, and I are available to answer your questions and concerns.

Transition Planning = A Transition to Success

The following principles of the Transition Steering Committee were recently approved by the department's Executive Management Team. Transition planning is a consistent theme of the department's 1999-2001 24-Month Plan.

The purpose of the Transition Group is to develop and plan, with Department of Corrections programs and community resources, to promote safe and successful inmate transition from incarceration to the community.

Underlying Principles:

1. Through partnerships, provide a continuum of services and activities from community, through incarceration, to successful community integration.



2. The purpose of the institution is to promote public safety by holding offenders accountable for their actions while allowing for implementation of individualized activities to prepare the inmate for successful reentry into the community and reducing risk of future criminal behavior.
3. Felons, corrections professionals, and service providers share responsibility and accountability for the transition process.
4. Transition begins the moment a felon enters our correctional system.
5. Program design will be based on research and shall produce measurable outcomes.
6. Consistent with our shared vision, integration with community resources is required to ensure successful outcomes.
7. Design and employ individual plans to ensure the most effective and judicious use of resources to reduce future criminal behavior.
8. Realign community and institution resources to promote transitional services.

Prison Advisory Committees Shaping Up Statewide

The Department of Corrections is organizing prison advisory committees (PAC's) for its existing and future facilities. PAC's are intended to provide a local communications conduit between the department and the community through members who are knowledgeable about DOC operations.

Committee members also serve as advisors to the institutions regarding correctional issues, activities and practices that may affect their communities. They may also assist in developing and promoting safe opportunities for the use of inmate labor.

The department has recently adopted a rule regarding PAC's to help guide institutions in maximizing their use of this valuable resource.

Y2K Update

The Oregon Department of Corrections has been working to minimize the impact of the Year 2000 (Y2K) computer bug on department operations.

As you may know, the Y2K Bug may interfere with the way some computer-controlled devices work when the year changes from 1999 to 2000. For several years the department has been looking for places where the bug may affect our operations and has been taking steps to squash it. We are very pleased with our progress; we've fixed many lines of computer code that could have caused some problems. We are even replacing some computer programs with new software that is Y2K ready and offers many efficient new features as well.

Before we traded in any old software for new, we took several steps:

- Made sure the old system was backed up so we could get to the data
- Tested a copy of the new system
- Ran the two systems at the same time for a few months
- Finally when we were satisfied with the performance of the new system, we turned the old one off and watched the new one carefully for a period of time.

Y2K preparation hasn't been without its challenges for the Department of Corrections. The good news is that our emergency preparedness model fit nicely with our Y2K Business Contingency Plans; each is proving to enhance the other. We have passed all the statewide tabletop emergency exercises with flying colors. The big test, of course, comes with the new year. We are confident that our research, actions and planning will prevent any interruption in services.



Awards Go East for First Time

The DOC annual awards ceremony was, for the first time, held in Pendleton this year. Department employees, contractors and volunteers turned out to salute the department's finest for 98-99. All were warmly welcomed by Pendleton Mayor Bob Ramig with a big Eastern Oregon "Howdy!"

The department's top honor, the Amos Reed Award, went to Superintendent Bill Beers, Shutter Creek Correctional Institution, for his outstanding work with the Oregon Summit Program. The award is named after one of the legends of the Oregon Department of Corrections who made countless contributions to our profession. Bill Beers carries that torch into the next century.

Oregon Random Drug Tests Hit Zero Again

For the third time within 14 months, Oregon inmates tested negative on random drug use tests. In July, 405 inmates were tested which is about 4.5 percent of the inmate population. Positive results have been less than one percent for 16 consecutive months. There were also no positive test results in May 1998 or March 1999.

Prison Design Strategy Analyzed in National Article

An article by a former Oregon Department of Corrections director, Thomas G. Toombs, Ph.D., was published in the summer 1999 issue of Corrections Management Quarterly. "Using Action Research to Create a Design for a Prototype Prison: A Case Study," analyzes the strategy used by the Oregon Department of Corrections in designing six new prisons that will be built over the next 10 to 15 years.

Measure 17 Compliance Rising

DOC's compliance with Measure 17 work requirements jumped in October to 78 percent in full compliance. Another 14 percent were engaged in work/job training part-time. This is up from 72 percent in September.

Growing More Than Food at OWCC

The Work-Based Education organic gardening program at Oregon Women's Correctional Center in Salem began in July 1996. The first class established the planting beds and produced a winter crop.

Since then, the garden has gradually expanded to roughly a half an acre of beds with year-round crops of fruit, vegetables and flowers. As the space has grown, so has the variety of plants.

Instructor Tani Swan and the students have recently added eggplant to the list of produce. Standard garden fare includes broccoli, tomatoes, greens, radishes, herbs, and strawberries.

In addition to the actual work in the garden, students spend time in the classroom learning about organic gardening procedures such as pest control and fertilization.

In July, about 300 lbs. of produce was harvested and served in the OWCC dining room. Additionally, the students grow garlic and make garlic braids which are sold to earn money for the program.

There are an average of nine students in the program. Tani and her students agree that the program promotes better mental health and improved social skills. "It's very therapeutic," says Susan Stanton, who has been in the program since August. "It gives me skills to take outside for a career. I've never had the opportunity for a career before."

Corrections Briefings

Oregon Department of Corrections
2575 Center Street, Salem, OR 97301-4667
(503)945-0925
<http://www.doc.state.or.us>

