



Multnomah County Sheriff's Office

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Exemplary service for a safe, livable community

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Executive Statement from Sheriff Michael Reese

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This week I heard from a handful of Multnomah County residents expressing concern about "jail inmate labor to assist in the Oregon Department of Transportation's sweeps of homeless encampments." In dealing with neighborhood livability issues at the intersection of public spaces and complex social issues such as homelessness, mental health and addiction, I have learned public safety must focus on much more than just responding to crime. Public safety agencies must be dedicated to the principle that, generally, the most effective approach to many crime and disorder problems is to address them from a human services and public health perspective. At the same time, it must be recognized that public safety agencies bring essential capabilities to a coordinated effort: engagement, peacekeeping, understanding and when necessary, enforcement.

The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) appreciates the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to neighborhood livability; we routinely hear from neighborhood groups that this is a top public safety priority. The Sheriff's Office is entrusted with a dual mission when it comes to neighborhood livability, which encompasses law enforcement and corrections. We are pleased to collaborate with the Joint Office of Homeless Services, Portland Police Bureau, Gresham Police Department, and a myriad of social service providers. By pooling our resources and coordinating our efforts, we become capable of making a significant difference in our community by maintaining the livability of our neighborhoods and connecting homeless persons with services.

To reduce tensions in our community, we strive to inform the public about our efforts. By collaborating with the Joint Office of Homeless Services, law enforcement units such as MCSO's Homeless Outreach and Program Engagement (HOPE) Team, consistently bring a peacekeeping response to neighborhood and business complaints and address the human services needs of people living in our public spaces. We engage individuals in need and match persons to available, appropriate services.

Our complaint-driven response to issues related to homelessness is empathy and compassion:

- To make efficient use of our resources, we develop and follow a comprehensive strategy that joins problem locations most effectively to services.
- We are diligent in maintaining areas after we establish control and will document and analyze outcomes for people and places through a case management system.
- Recognizing that undisturbed sleep is important to the ability of people to function well, in the absence of a complaint, we generally do not awaken people during evening hours.
- We recognize that showing respect for people increases cooperation and positive social behavior.
- We keep our direction to people simple and clear to maximize the level of voluntary compliance (e.g. "You must have permission from the owner to camp on private property").

- Structure enforcement efforts will depend on factors such as jurisdiction, number of people, complaint history, public safety and health concerns. It is important that enforcement expectations at any particular location be clearly announced - ample notice is provided, services are offered, and any remaining property is inventoried and protected, so its owner may claim it at a later time.

Again, MCSO's public safety goal is to function as a safety net to human services and facilitator of public health, which invokes our second mission - corrections and specific to this discussion, work crews. Per Section 41, Article 1 of the Oregon Constitution, adults in custody may be sentenced to work "as hard as the taxpayers who provide for their upkeep... and fully engage in productive activity if they are to successfully re-enter society with practical skills and a viable work ethic."

Work crews may help the correctional facility itself, other government operations and support the community. Multnomah County's criminal justice system partners screen adults in custody (e.g. sentencing, physical/mental health, administrative classification) to ensure work crew participation is viable for everyone. Adults in custody engage in work ranging from kitchen duty, laundry and janitorial services, and landscaping maintenance. Yet, work crew is generally preferred by eligible individuals because it offers time outside and away from confinement.

Work crew projects are tied to government public works contracts. For example, Multnomah County contracts with the City of Portland and the Oregon Department of Transportation. When an area is closed, after ample notice is provided, services are offered, and property is inventoried, clean up ensues. Work crews may be dispatched to such areas, after adults in custody are screened eligible, trained for service, and provided with necessary equipment.

Per Oregon law, work crew participants are eligible for reduced sentencing, as but one incentive. Work crews are also compensated an amount established by the respective governing body, which provides individuals with additional funds for jail commissary purchases and ensures they are covered by workers compensation if injured on the job. Working allows an adult in custody to learn new skills for use upon release and MCSO offers job recommendations to ease the transition into society. Of course, all adults entrusted to custody have access to medical care, counseling, and other trauma-informed programming, which seeks to address needs specific to that individual.

Overall, work crews further the self-esteem and improves the lives of adults in custody. It furthers the principles of restorative justice, a system of criminal justice that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large. I am grateful to serve as Sheriff in an Office that is committed to maintaining livability in all Multnomah County neighborhoods via robust partnership with social service providers and community members, and thoughtful diversionary programming that connects people to appropriate services and strategic enforcement.

Thank you again for expressing interest in MCSO's role in neighborhood livability, which ultimately turns on creative partnership with the community. Intergovernmental entities remain poised to learn of neighborhoods that are open and welcoming to small groups of campers, so impacted individuals may be directed to specific locations. Thank you in advance for informing MCSO's Public Information Office at pio@mcsso.us of areas in your neighborhood you feel are appropriate for the homeless to camp. For more information about how the region is collectively managing neighborhood livability please visit the Joint Office of Homeless website accessible here: <https://multco.us/joint-office-homeless-services>.