



Multnomah County judge creates task force to review recent report that found Oregon's juvenile justice system weak

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Multnomah County officials are convening a special task force to examine the findings of a recent report that was critical of its juvenile justice system. (*The Oregonian*)

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Responding to a recent report critical of the state's and Multnomah County's juvenile justice system, the county has assembled a Juvenile Task Force to discuss the issues raised.

"We are committed to system improvement through the use of best practices and looking to reliable data to inform our decision making," the members of the task force said in a statement Wednesday. "We welcome the opportunity to consider these issues in an inclusive, multi-disciplinary and rigorous assessment of our current practices."

The task force was set up in response to a **report** that **Clackamas County District Attorney John Foote** and retired Multnomah County Deputy District Attorney Charles French issued in late August, which argued that Oregon's juvenile justice system based on the Annie E. Casey Foundation model isn't working.

In the report, they cited 2011 FBI and Oregon arrest figures that show the state has the second highest juvenile drug arrest rates in the nation and the 12th highest juvenile property crime arrest rates.

Foote and French contend the juvenile property crime rates in Oregon are due largely because the state has adopted a hands-off policy for juvenile drug offenders by not detaining them, routinely closing their cases and taking no action when a youth is referred by police or other authorities.

Scott Taylor, director of Multnomah County's Department of Community Justice, has questioned a number of assertions in the report, and called some of its figures "skewed."

Multnomah County Circuit Court's Presiding Judge Nan Waller worked to set up the task force to examine the report and its findings. Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill, who will also sit on the task force said, "We're going to look at the work that we do in that area."

French and Foote are not included as members of the task force, but will be invited to make a presentation to the group.

"We want to applaud Multnomah County for initiating a review of its current juvenile system. This is precisely what we had hoped would happen as a result of our report," Foote and French said in a written response. They urged the task force to conduct its review based on data, not ideology.

"We believe any group that does such a review should contain equal representation from law enforcement and juvenile system representatives," Foote and French wrote. "We know from personal experience that it can be difficult to challenge the status

quo, but that is exactly what is required here. We look forward to seeing the results of their efforts."

No dates, times or locations have been determined yet for the task force meetings.

Waller put out this statement on behalf of the task force members Wednesday:

Multnomah County has a long tradition of collaborating on public safety issues, including our juvenile justice system. We are and have been unwavering in our commitment to positive outcomes for our children and young people involved in the juvenile justice system and to assuring the safety of our community. We are committed to system improvement through the use of best practices and looking to reliable data to inform our decision making. A recent report commissioned by John Foote, District Attorney in Clackamas County, raises questions about how well the juvenile justice system in Multnomah County is currently functioning. We welcome the opportunity to consider these issues in an inclusive, multi-disciplinary, and rigorous assessment of our current practices. We will be convening a task force to begin this assessment. In keeping with the Multnomah County tradition, this group will be a collaboration that includes all key juvenile justice system partners and stakeholders.

Nan Waller, Presiding Judge Multnomah County Circuit Court

Deborah Kafoury, Chair Multnomah County Board of Commissioners

Maureen McKnight, Chief Family Judge Multnomah County Circuit Court

Rod Underhill, Multnomah County District Attorney

Mike Reese, Chief, Portland Police Bureau

Scott Taylor, Director, Multnomah County Department of Community Justice

Christina McMahan, Multnomah County Juvenile Services Division Director

Abbey Stamp, Executive Director, Multnomah County Local Public Safety Coordinating Council

Suzanne Hayden, Executive Director, Citizen's Crime Commission

Lane Borg, Executive Director, Metropolitan Public Defender's Office

Mark McKechnie, Executive Director, Youth, Rights & Justice

Meg Garvin, Executive Director, National Crime Victim Law Institute

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