

## **Multnomah County Ballot Measure 26-233**

**Official Title:** Amends charter: annual jail inspections by commissioners with volunteers, reporting.

**Question:** Should Charter require County Commissioners, with selected volunteers, inspect County jails annually, with interviews, record review, unannounced access, public reports?

**Financial Impact:** Unclear. The Charter Committee recommended that volunteers be “reasonably compensated for their time.” However, total compensation would depend on the stipend as well as the number of volunteers, number of visits, and time spent gathering information and writing reports. Testimony submitted to the Committee also indicates that County staff time devoted to preparation and scheduling would also increase.

**Probable Results of “Yes” Vote:** Commissioners are currently required to visit County jails at least once per regular term and do so annually. This measure would require at least one additional inspection per year and that one or more volunteer members of the public be invited to participate.

**Probable Results of “No” Vote:** Commissioners would continue to visit County jails at least once per year but would not be required to include volunteer members of the public.

**Background:** Oregon Revised Statute 169.040 states that boards of county commissioners throughout the State must visit county correctional facilities at least once per term; Multnomah County Resolution 06-198 stipulates that County Commissioners will visit facilities, including the Inverness Jail and the Multnomah County Detention Center, once per year. In addition to inspections by Commissioners, the Multnomah County Sheriff’s office noted additional inspections in its testimony: “by the Corrections Grand Jury, as well as Oregon State Jail Inspections, health and fire inspections, tours by members of the advocacy community, such as, Disability Rights Oregon and Commissioner and other elected officials’ tours.” In addition, County Commissioners tour correctional facilities with representatives from the Corrections Deputies union.

After reviewing testimony from a member of the public, the Charter Commission advocated including the Commissioners’ inspections as part of the County Charter. The proposed amendment increases the number of inspections to at least twice a year; inspections would also include one or more volunteer constituents who are not connected to either the Auditor’s office or the facility.

**Summary of Measure:** This measure requires that County Commissioners inspect County jails and correctional facilities at least twice per year and include one or more members of the public, who would then issue a report including observations, conclusions and recommendations. The measure further requires that, in the course of these visits, the Sheriff’s office allow access to records, to interviews with consenting staff and inmates, and to any part of the facility without prior notice.

### **Supporters Say:**

- Increasing the number of inspections would promote oversight and would help Commissioners better understand the conditions of people in custody.
- Reports from constituents would raise public awareness and potentially foster improved health and safety in County facilities.

**Opponents Say:**

- Neither County Commissioners nor members of the public often possess expertise in legal standards for jail inspections, nor are they well-versed in identifying specific issues and proposing solutions. The County might be better served by audits informed by clear goals and expertise in the field.
- The amendment doesn't provide a mechanism for disseminating constituents' reports to the public so it's unclear who would benefit from the information.