



June 28, 2018

To: Chair Deborah Kafoury, Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson, Commissioner Lori Stegmann, Commissioner Loretta Smith, and Commissioner Sharon Meieran

Re: Setting a Higher Bar for the Multnomah County District Attorney Budget

Dear Multnomah County Commissioners,

We represent a diverse group of Oregon nonprofits with a broad range of interests including public safety, public health, racial justice, immigrant rights, civil rights, gender equity, voter access, and criminal justice among many other important issues. We engage tens of thousands of people a year in multi-faceted ways in Multnomah County. We want our criminal justice system to continually strive to be more effective, fair, and transparent.

Budgets are a reflection of our values and vision for what kind of outcomes we want to see in our communities. We are joining together to ask you to commit to working with us and the District Attorney's (DA) office over the next year to develop and adopt a meaningfully new framework for the DA's budget. We fundamentally believe that Multnomah County should set a higher bar for the performance measures embedded in the DA budget to help the county assess that office's work and the impact of the tens of millions of dollars in public resources spent annually.

Today, the DA's budget fails to tell us how the DA's office is effectively contributing to building safe and healthy communities for **all** Multnomah County residents. Instead, the budget largely measures the total number of criminal cases reviewed, issued, and resolved.

On any given year, well over 10,000 people directly interact with the DA's office in ways that can fundamentally change their lives for the better or worse. The policies, practices, priorities, and structure of the DA's office can be the difference between whether or not crime victims get

access to critical services that help them rebuild their lives, whether or not young people are held accountable in a way that protects their future life-possibilities, whether people of color are treated fairly, or whether children keep contact and connection with their parents.

We must improve the performance measurements included in the budget. Prosecutors shouldn't be evaluated primarily on the number of cases processed but on the quality of the outcomes.

Upon examining the DA budget, we observe a lack of values-based public-safety outcomes being used as performance measures. For example, the current DA budget does not have a single explicit output, outcome, or performance measure focused on increasing equity or inclusion in its work or reducing devastating racial disparities. By contrast, the Department of Community Justice budget appears to be making a sincere and intentional effort to include those goals and values in its work in measurable ways. So we know it can be done.

There is a growing dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system's status quo. In many places, our policies and practices have not kept up with the research on what delivers the best public safety outcomes, and patience has run out on a system that continues to treat people of color more harshly.

We encourage you read the memo written by the ACLU of Oregon that provides more in-depth information about improving the district attorney's budget framework. The memo points to a range of areas where the district attorney's office could make important strides in strengthening performance measures to:

- Address racial disparities
- Reduce recidivism
- Increase workforce diversity
- Support crime victims
- Improve staff training
- Demonstrate the cost benefit of DA's practices

We are conscious of the fact that we are starting this conversation deep into the process of passing the FY19 County Budget. We are not asking for any changes to the existing substance or structure of the budget you have before you.

We are asking the county to commit to improving the budget over time. We want the County Commission to work with interested community groups and the DA's office to ensure next year there will be a set of new metrics for the DA's budget. Those performance measures should better reflect values like equity and inclusion, fairness, harm reduction, and a sharp focus on outcomes that build safe and healthy communities. We will follow up with suggestions for people who can bring these crucial perspectives to the DA related budget committee.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David Rogers  
Executive Director  
American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon

CJ Robbins  
Black Male Achievement  
City of Portland, Office of Equity and Human Rights

Dani Ledezma  
Interim Executive Director  
Coalition of Communities of Color

Doreen Binder  
President  
League of Women Voters of Portland

Pastor E.D. Mondaine  
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Samantha Gladu  
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