

OYA *In the Loop*

January 29, 2009

Legislative session is underway

In this time of new beginnings, earlier this month the 75th Legislative Assembly convened. Members were sworn in and began their work in earnest.

Here at OYA we started planning for the legislative session months ago. For instance, systems are in place to track bills and we have been working diligently on our agency's budget presentation. Additionally, because of the state's financial circumstances, we have created budget reduction scenarios in response to requests from the Legislature and DAS.

Hundreds of bills have been introduced, and every one of them has been read by a member of our Central Office legislative team. Each bill that has, or might have, an impact on OYA or our partners is assigned a priority level and a bill manager. The bill manager tracks the bill, writes testimony if necessary, and is otherwise responsible for always knowing their bills' status. In addition, bills can be amended, changing their meaning and impact on the agency, so we have to track legislation carefully.

This legislative session, OYA has three bills that the Governor filed on our behalf. SB 106 allows us to contract with tribes to provide gang intervention services. Right now we can only have those kinds of contracts with counties, with the intention that counties work with the tribes. This legislation is consistent with SB 770, which established government-to-government relationships with tribes in 2003.

SB 107 ratifies a new interstate compact for juveniles. Oregon needs this legislation to ensure that we help draft and abide by agreements among the states that govern what happens when youth need to cross state lines.

HB 2187 gives OYA specific authority to fingerprint prospective foster parents and members of their households. Just as we fingerprint staff and contractors, youth safety is the rationale behind requesting this statutory clarification.

Most bills that affect OYA will be heard in one of three committees: the House Judiciary Committee, the Senate Judiciary Committee, or the Public Safety Subcommittee of the Joint Ways and Means Committee. The "Public Safety Sub," as it is known, is responsible for determining our budget. We generally spend about a week in the early spring presenting information about our agency's background, mission, achievements and challenges.

We've heard that the '09-'11 budget won't be tackled until the Legislature has had an opportunity to balance this biennium's budget, so while we are preparing for a March presentation, this year it may come later.

Two members of our legislative team, Jean Straight and Perrin Damon, have been meeting with individual members of our committees for several reasons. First, it is helpful that they know who to go to within the agency to have their questions answered. Second, Jean and Perrin have shared the rationale for our three bills with members to help with their understanding of the bills' background.

On these visits, Jean and Perrin have taken with them packets of information about OYA. The packets contain issue briefs, which are briefing papers about OYA subject matter. The information is being presented in small bites – mostly one page. You can find the issue briefs on the network. To find them go to the OYA home page at www.oregon.gov/oia. More are being added daily.

Last week I had the pleasure of escorting members and staff of the Judiciary Committees on tours of Hillcrest YCF and Oak Creek YCF. We had about 20 people each day, and I was pleased with their active interest in our youth, their progress, and how we help them. They also asked what they could do to help us achieve our mission. Many thanks to Troy Gregg, Lory Humbert and their staffs for welcoming us to their facilities and demonstrating our work with the youth.

One outcome of the tours was the keen interest of some committee members and staff to learn more about our treatment programs for girls. They asked us to put together an educational presentation about dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and some of the other modalities we are using to shape young women in our custody. We anticipate that that presentation will take place next month or in early March.

I also attended a hearing on Wednesday in which Dr. Ed Latessa of the University of Cincinnati testified about evidence-based programs. Dr. Latessa has helped Oregon agencies to establish a means to gauge program effectiveness, and is the creator of the Correctional Program Checklist used by our agency and the Department of Corrections. It was great for me to hear first-hand about his research and the practices he recommends, and that, in turn, will help me make decisions for our agency.

Wednesday was also SEIU day at the Capitol, and I was pleased to run into several of our staff who took their time to talk with legislators about the relationships between management and labor and about the issues we are working on together. Several of SEIU staff were also in Dr. Latessa's presentation.

This is a good opportunity to remind all staff that while on the job, all contact with legislators and their staff must be run by our legislative team. The reason for this is simple: we must speak to the Legislature with one voice. Nothing in this request precludes you from having contact with legislators on your own time.

If a legislator or their staff contact you about a work-related matter, please let a member of the legislative team know – we can help decide who responds. We also start a clock ticking on our response time with a goal of providing information within 24 – 48 hours.

Meanwhile, our deputy director, Fariborz Pakseresht, began a series of listening sessions at MacLaren. Fariborz initiated these to learn from different groups of staff and contractors about those things that are working well and things that can be improved as they relate to treatment programs.

To date he has met with several individuals and groups. Fariborz will be synthesizing the information he gathers and we will consider and incorporate them into our future plans. More importantly, this is an opportunity to get our professional staff and contractors involved in shaping the future of OYA.

I will update you periodically on our progress during the legislative session.