

OYA *In the Loop*

May 5, 2009

You know from a previous In the Loop that we were asked by several legislators to provide them with additional budget reduction options, specifically options that keep regional facilities open. As I'd predicted, they requested that those options look at Hillcrest and MacLaren.

The co-chair of the Public Safety Subcommittee, Senator Joanne Verger, asked to meet with me about alternative budget scenarios, particularly regarding facilities. That meeting took place this morning and was attended by Co-Chair Verger, Senator Doug Whitsett, Assistant Director Joan Palmateer, and Laurie Byerly, our Legislative Fiscal Office analyst. Co-Chair Chip Shields was invited, but was unable to attend due to prior commitments.

In preparation for today's meeting, Joan assembled a team of facility superintendents, labor, field supervisors, program staff and budget staff to look at budget alternatives. Over a period of five days, these folks worked on and refined options, three of which were presented today. The options are: 1. close Hillcrest, 2. downsize MacLaren, and/or 3. downsize Hillcrest. The attachment shows the money savings associated with those alternatives.

As I've shared with you before, the Legislature may choose all, none, or a combination of these options. They may revisit those we've offered before. Our job is to answer their questions and, when asked, provide them with alternatives, costs and information about the downsides of each. As you know, I feel strongly that you should be informed about new developments as soon as practicable. I want you to know what is being considered, and what is at stake.

Candidly, I do not know where this will lead. The subcommittee will make its recommendations to the full Ways and Means Committee, the committee will make its recommendation to the entire legislative body, and after its approval, the budget then goes to the Governor. The Governor and his staff will watch the process closely and make recommendations when appropriate. At almost any step of the way, options may be considered, added, changed or dropped.

Certain things are for-sure. The Legislature appreciates OYA's role in the public safety continuum. As budget demands grow and priorities of government are revisited, members have made it clear to me that they understand the importance of our mission of reformation, accountability and public safety.

I know that at times the information I share with you likely sounds and feels bleak and disconnected. I want to assure you that from the Governor to the Legislature to every member of our staff who has touched these options – we know that they affect the lives of youth and families, the quality of life of Oregonians, and the livelihoods of staff.

That being said, I am more hopeful now than I have been for many months. I am hopeful that the May revenue forecast will not cut the General Fund as deeply as has been feared, and that reductions to OYA will be moderate rather than severe. The next forecast will be released in mid-May, and then we will know more about the magnitude of reductions we will face. Let's prepare for the worst and hope for the best. Let's continue to encourage one another and to be hopeful in these uncertain times.

My thanks to all of you for your dedication to Oregon's juvenile justice system.

Bobby