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## Linn, Marion counties seek state hospital rules changes

ALBANY — Linn County will join with Marion County asking for changes in how long criminal defendants can be held at the Oregon State Hospital, Commissioners Roger Nyquist, Sherrie Sprenger and Will Tucker agreed Tuesday morning.

In September 2022, a federal judge ruled that criminal defendants could not be housed at the hospital for more than one year. The decision also means anyone charged with a misdemeanor cannot be housed at the state hospital and those services must be provided at the county level.

According to a letter to Gov. Kotek and David Baden interim director of the Oregon Health Authority, Marion County Commissioners Colm Willis, Kevin Cameron and Danielle Bethell contend that decision, “essentially ended all civil commitments to the state hospital and has left more individuals with untreated behavioral health needs requiring a hospital level of care in our communities.”

Commissioner Nyquist said the state is failing to adequately operate a hospital that meets the statewide needs. He added the mental health issues are a key factor in why many people are homeless. He said the state must add capacity to meet those needs.

Commissioner Sprenger, who previously served as a state representative, said reducing the number of beds at the state hospital has been a legislative policy statement for several years.

Marion County and now Linn County, are asking:

- That if someone is a risk to the community, they be admitted to the state hospital.

- That the state develop a long-term plan to provide secure in-patient services to meet the anticipated need for the next 20 years.
- The state be required to modify its expedited admissions policy so that more individuals can be admitted through the civil commitment process.
- The state be required to retain liability for individuals on community restoration, if under state law, they would have been released from the state hospital.
- There be a limit the amount of time an individual can remain in community restoration.
- There be a “safety valve” to allow for longer stays at the state hospital if a trial court finds that person presents significant public safety issues.
- That the state accept individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes.
- In other business, the commissioners:
- Approved a temporary part-time employment agreement with Sgt. Brad Kelley, to operate the Linn County Sheriff’s Office’s firearms range after his retirement on May 31. He has been a firearms instructor for 20 years and has been Rangemaster for five years.
- Approved continuation of an employment contract with Sgt. Dusty Frenzel to work as a Patrol Sergeant through June 30, 2024. His current contract expires on June 30.
- Approved an agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation to provide funding not to ex-

- ceed \$543,683 for the biennium to support the Senior Citizens of Sweet Home/Linn Shuttle/Dial-a-bus program.
- Approved a closure of Main Street in Brownsville for the Pioneer Picnic parades June 16 and 17 and approved a paving contract for \$68,362 with North Santiam Paving with the Albany Maintenance District. Roadmaster Wayne Mink said paving holds up better than chip sealing at intersections where heavy farm equipment is common.
- Approved end-of-the-year fund transfers for: the Linn County Sheriff’s Office, \$205,000; Veterans Services, \$2,000 from the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs; Fair & Expo Center, \$180,000 Materials & Services.
- Approved an agreement for the Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Program to be implemented by the Linn County Juvenile work crews as part of the Fuels Reduction Program. The Juvenile Department has received a Forest Service grant for the following: \$36,874 for a wood chipper; \$54,000 for youth wages; \$10,240 for a dump trailer.
- Approved a contract with Garten Services for \$137,581 for janitorial services in all of the county building except the Courthouse and the Old Armory.

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