

OJRC AND MDI CALL FOR URGENT INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO RECENT DEATHS

July 28, 2023

PORTLAND, Ore. – Advocates for the accused and the incarcerated have written to the Multnomah County Commissioners asking them to launch a system-wide independent investigation into what is happening at the county jail. Since May 2, five people have died in custody at the Inverness Jail (MCIJ) and the Multnomah County Detention Center (MCDC). Oregon Justice Resource Center and Multnomah Defenders, Inc. believe an inquiry is urgently needed in the interests of transparency and to prevent more deaths.

The number of deaths so far this year exceeds any yearly total going back to 2010 according to reporting by Willamette Week based on information from the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission and Reuters. The data show that since 2010 there has been no year in which as many as five people have died in the custody of the Sheriff with the highest numbers of deaths at four apiece in 2010 and 2015.

Since May 2023, five indigent people are known to have died in the custody of the Multnomah County Sheriff:

- Twenty-six-year-old Donovan Anthony Wood died at MCIJ on May 2,
- Thirty-one-year-old Allen George Walker died at MCDC on May 13,
- Fifty-eight-year-old Martin Todd Franklin died at MCDC on June 16,
- Fifty-three-year-old Kashi Abram Harmon died at MCIJ on June 22, and
- Thirty-one-year-old Josiah Pierce died at MCIJ on July 19.

OJRC and MDI want information about these five deaths to be released promptly as well as any details about how jail operations may have contributed to the loss of life. They're hopeful that the County Commissioners will share their concern about the need to fully understand what happened and how to ensure no further deaths occur.

“When we think about some of the other jails and jail systems in the country, such as Rikers Island in New York, we might assume that the Multnomah County jail would compare favorably with them,” said Bobbin Singh, Executive Director, Oregon Justice Resource Center. “Yet when you consider the relative populations of each jail, the death rate so far this year in our local jail is more than quadruple that of Rikers. We need to understand what’s happening and transparency about the causes and conditions that led to these deaths and end this troubling pattern.”

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