



Statement on the appointment of Mike Reese as Director of the Oregon Department of Corrections

10.24.23

“Governor Kotek had the opportunity to appoint someone forward-thinking as Director of the Oregon Department of Corrections. Instead, she has appointed Mike Reese, a law enforcement professional who does not have experience of working with Oregonians or any individuals in prison. Reese also does not have a background in rehabilitation or any model of care for those serving long sentences.

This signals that Governor Kotek views prisons as a law enforcement issue rather than a human centered issue. Yet, one of the problems with ODOC’s culture is its paramilitary and law enforcement approach to people in custody. We have heard from the Governor her rhetoric of accountability and care for human dignity, but we are not seeing it in practice. Once again, Governor Kotek’s stewardship of ODOC fails to show a proportionate response to the agency’s highly dysfunctional state. ODOC’s mistreatment of people in custody includes violations of constitutional rights; denial of basic needs; sexual, physical, and mental harm; negligent medical care; excessive punishment; and general disregard for human life and wellbeing.

Mike Reese’s background as Multnomah County Sheriff and with the Portland Police Bureau is littered with controversies. These agencies have had profound problems with accountability, violence against members of the community, and bigoted and biased practices that have disproportionately harmed BIPOC. Reese does not signify the urgent value change that is required at ODOC, but rather his appointment is doubling down on a historic value system that has resulted in and sustained mass incarceration. Reese has stated a commitment to rehabilitation at ODOC and to upholding accountability, integrity, and professionalism from staff, however without appointing an individual who meaningfully represents a change to the current value system and structures that have resulted in ODOC being an agency in crisis, this commitment cannot realistically be fulfilled.”

Statement to be attributed to Bobbin Singh, Executive Director, Oregon Justice Resource Center.