

Crook County Board of County Commissioners Minutes of February 13, 2026, Special Session

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of County Commissioners met in a Special Session on February 13, 2026, at 1:00 PM in the Crook County Annex, located at 320 NE Court Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

Special Session Agenda

Board Members Present: Seth Crawford, Susan Hermreck, Brian Barney

Board Members Absent:

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; District Attorney Kari Hathorn; Juvenile Services Director Erika Frickey; Finance Director Christina Haron; and members of the public.

The meeting was called to order at 01:00 PM.

Public Comment

None

Discussion

1. Review of Core Services for the District Attorney's Office and Juvenile Services

Requester:

Will Van Vactor, County Manager

Presenter(s):

Kari Hathorn, District Attorney

Erika Frickey, Director of Juvenile Services

Details:

County Manager Will Van Vactor explained the purpose of the meeting was to continue discussions regarding core service descriptions, specifically for the District Attorney's Office and Juvenile Services. It was noted that this session represents the second-to-last group of departments to be reviewed as part of the core services project. An overview of the purpose of defining core services was provided, emphasizing that core services are fundamental and essential government functions aligned with each department's mission, statutory requirements, and community needs. Core services were described as legally mandated functions and essential public services that ensure public welfare, operational sustainability, strategic prioritization, and accountability. The review process is intended to clearly define essential services, guide budgeting and resource allocation, and reinforce public trust and transparency.

Details: District Attorney Kari Hathorn presented an overview of the office's core functions, emphasizing a mission centered on seeking justice, promoting community safety, and upholding the law with impartiality and integrity. The primary responsibility of the office is the prosecution of adult and juvenile criminal offenses, which involves reviewing police reports, determining the admissibility of evidence, and coordinating the

grand jury process for felony cases. Beyond standard prosecution, the DA's office manages several specialized mandates, including conducting all unattended death investigations and leading child fatality reviews to identify preventative measures for the community. The office also handles civil commitment proceedings for individuals in mental health crises and manages post-conviction relief cases and public records request appeals. Kari highlighted the vital role of the Victims' Assistance Program, which serves as the primary liaison between the justice system and victims, ensuring they are informed of court dates and plea offers despite heavy staff caseloads. The office also remains deeply integrated with local and regional partners through the Tri-County Major Incident Team and participates in specialty courts such as Recovery Court (Drug) and Wellness Court (Mental Health), with plans to explore a dedicated Veteran's Court. Despite these robust services, Kari noted significant challenges, including the "clunky" nature of the state's remote child support enforcement system and the exponential increase in digital data storage requirements—driven by law enforcement body cameras—which has necessitated a shift toward more advanced, costly software solutions like Evidence.com.

Kari addressed growing concerns regarding the Oregon Public Defense Commission (OPDC) and its impact on the local justice system. While Crook County has not yet reached the point of dismissing cases due to a lack of available counsel, Kari warned that the system is approaching a state of "overflow" similar to other Oregon counties. She expressed deep frustration with the OPDC's lack of transparency, specifically regarding the "Maximum Attorney Case Count" (MAC). This arbitrary and "weighted" numbering system often prevents capable local attorneys from taking on new cases based on metrics that neither the District Attorney's office nor the local defense consortia can clearly define or defend. Kari noted that this lack of clarity is a disservice to taxpayers and a direct threat to the rights of both defendants and victims.

The discussion further highlighted the tangible risks to community safety caused by these systemic failures. Kari cited a specific incident where a dangerous individual, charged with attempted armed burglary with a knife, had to be released from custody simply because no attorney was available for appointment. To mitigate these issues, the office has been forced to adopt administrative workarounds, such as strategically avoiding certain probation violation filings to prevent "double-counting" cases against an attorney's MAC. Ultimately, Kari emphasized that while the pressure eased temporarily at the start of the new contract cycle, she lacks confidence that the crisis is over. She called for greater accountability from the OPDC, arguing that local judicial and prosecutorial authorities should have more influence in prioritizing major cases over minor ones to ensure the system does not continue to languish.

Details: Juvenile Services Director Erika Frickey provided an overview of the Juvenile Department's operations, noting that while the department often operates in a "mysterious bubble" due to confidentiality statutes, its core mission is to protect the community by holding youth accountable through developmentally appropriate responses. A major theme of the presentation was the necessity of a swift response to juvenile offenses; Erika explained that traditional court timelines can take 6 to 9 months

to resolve, which often causes the "action-consequence" connection to lose its impact on a young person. To address this, the department focuses on diversion opportunities and Formal Accountability Agreements that provide immediate consequences outside the formal court process. This approach helps prevent recidivism while ensuring youth do not develop a "sour taste" for the justice system before they reach adulthood.

The department utilizes a comprehensive Juvenile Crime Prevention (JCP) Risk Assessment to move away from "blanket" case management toward individualized plans. This intake process investigates family history, trauma, and learning disabilities to determine if a youth can be safely managed in the community or requires detention. Erika highlighted a significant "resource gap" on the local side of the mountain, noting that when families become "fatigued" by chronic behavior, youth are often placed in distant counties or even out of state. She pointed out that these youth flourish when removed from chaos and given consistent boundaries—as seen in the Canal House model in Redmond—but the lack of local out-of-home placement remains a major hurdle that forces kids to endure long bus rides and isolation from their supportive peer groups.

Erika also emphasized the department's Prevention Program, a rarity in Oregon, which intervenes with families before youth are officially involved in the court system. This program removes barriers by providing rides to school or appointments and helps "fatigued" parents share the burden of discipline. On the restorative side, the department has implemented a Restitution Program and "Letters of Responsibility" to help youth build empathy and repay their victims. Looking toward the future, Erika warned of potential budgetary impacts; if regional detention partners like Norcor or Deschutes County were to close or change their funding models, nightly detention costs for the county could jump from approximately \$208 to over \$400 per night at more distant facilities. Despite these challenges, Erika noted that 93% of their cases in 2024 did not escalate to Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) commitment, demonstrating the success of their intensive, individualized case management.

Commissioner Hermreck commended Erika's leadership and the strong team culture within the department, noting the collaborative, family-oriented environment and shared commitment to serving youth. Erika acknowledged the challenges of the work and emphasized the importance of mutual support among staff, cross-training to ensure coverage during absences, and fostering a workplace culture built on trust and understanding. She explained that the team works collaboratively to manage caseload demands and step in to assist one another as needed. It was also noted that the supportive office environment positively impacts the youth served, providing structure and stability. The department welcomes youth to utilize the office space as a safe and supportive environment when appropriate.

Will Van Vactor thanked Erika and Kari for their work in preparing the core service descriptions and for their participation in the meeting. He noted that the review process is nearing completion, with only a few departments remaining. Upon completion, a finalized packet will be presented to the Board. The document will serve as a living

document, to be reviewed annually and updated as needed to reflect changes in state or federal requirements, Board priorities, and community needs. Appreciation was also expressed to staff and the Board for their continued time and efforts throughout the process, with special recognition given to Breyanna for her support.

MOTION: Seth Crawford moved to adjourn the meeting. Susan Hermreck seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 02:01 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant