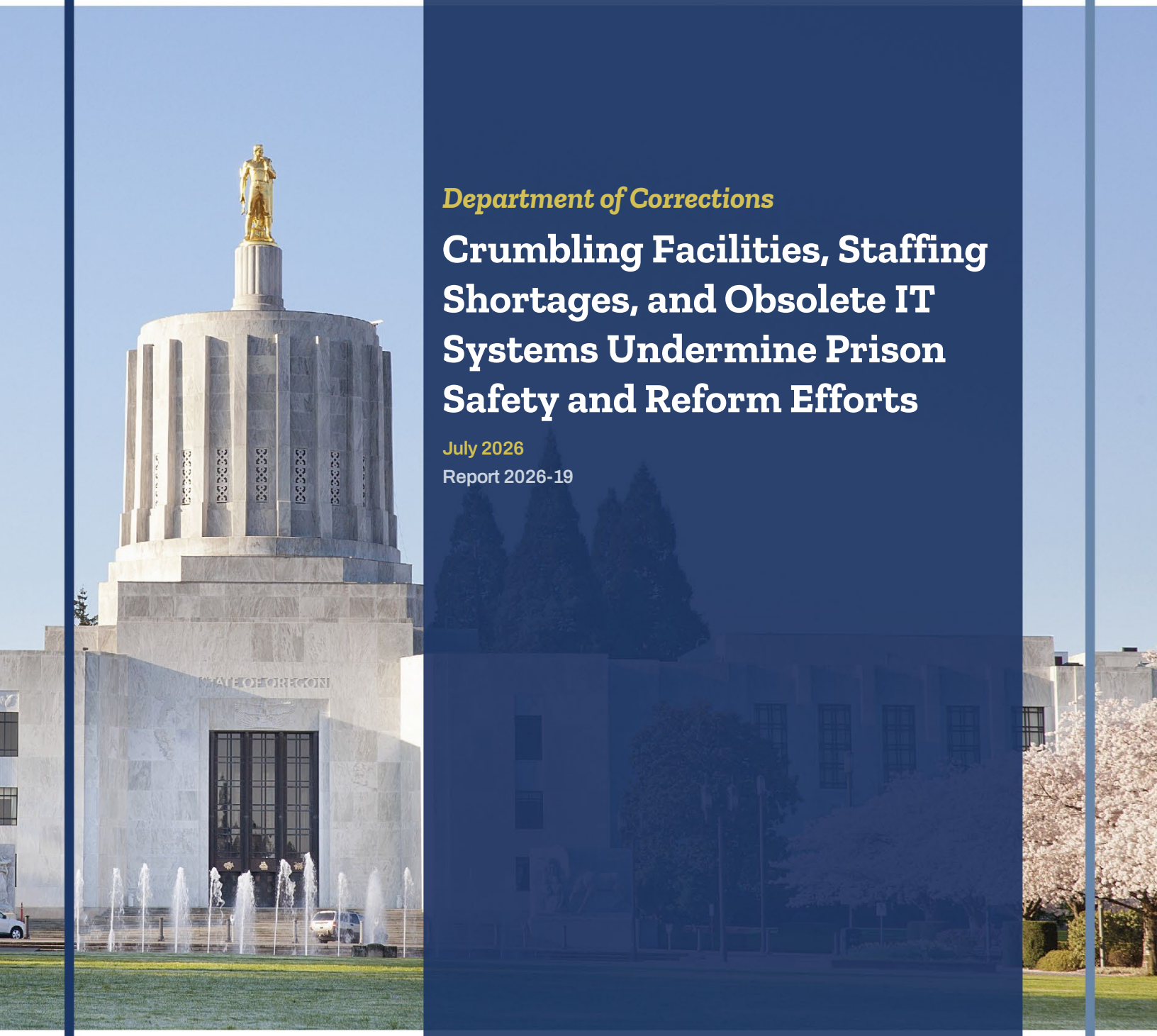

Department of Corrections

Crumbling Facilities, Staffing Shortages, and Obsolete IT Systems Undermine Prison Safety and Reform Efforts

July 2026

Report 2026-19

Oregon Secretary of State

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Secretary of State **Tobias Read**
Audits Director **Steve Bergmann**

Audit Summary

Department of Corrections

Crumbling Facilities, Staffing Shortages, and Obsolete IT Systems Undermine Prison Safety and Reform Efforts

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this audit was to determine whether Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities, staffing practices, and IT systems align with modern correctional standards to promote adults in custody rehabilitation and staff wellness.

SCOPE

The audit covered DOC facilities housing adults in custody, the administration of the Oregon Way, and key information systems, including the Corrections Information System and Offender Management System. It focused on select institutions highlighting DOC's challenges in meeting modern correctional standards and the application of the Oregon Way principles were applied to security staff. The review addressed key technology systems but did not include all DOC IT systems.

Why this audit is important

The DOC administers state correctional institutions and has custody of more than 12,000 adults housed across 12 state prisons. Its mission is to protect communities, promote accountability, and transform lives of incarcerated adults. DOC oversees adults sentenced to Oregon prisons for more than 12 months and, to fulfill this role effectively, requires adequate physical infrastructure, systems, and staffing. However, years of unaddressed maintenance backlogs, staffing shortages, and outdated IT systems have left the agency at risk of underperformance.

What we found

DOC's nearly $861 million maintenance backlog puts incarcerated adults at risk. (see Chapter 1, pg. 9)
Nationally, many incarcerated individuals face serious health and social challenges that can worsen in custody, especially among the aging population, who cost two to three times more to care for. Many of DOC's outdated facilities are poorly lit, ventilated, and maintained, creating unsafe conditions and failing to meet standards for accessibility and basic living conditions. Deferred maintenance funding needs have surged from $568.5 million in 2020 to almost $861 million a few years later, not including necessary seismic upgrades, far outpacing available funding and continuing to grow. The Oregon State Penitentiary is projected to become functionally obsolete in the near future, as the century-old, fully occupied facility relies on critical repairs instead of preventative maintenance, no longer suitable for modern correctional standards, and continues to pose serious safety, health, and accessibility risks to adults in custody. During the 2025-27 legislative session, DOC received $3 million of its $5 million request for phase I of a project for replacing the Oregon State Penitentiary and building a centralized geriatric medical facility.

Reform shows promise but is undermined by mandatory overtime and staff burnout. (see Chapter 2, pg. 16)
Led by DOC, the Oregon Way initiative aims to create a more normalized correctional environment and culture that improves outcomes for incarcerated individuals. Although still in its early stages, qualitative evidence suggests reduced volatility and better staff well-being. For example, the Oregon State Penitentiary Resource Team has had success transitioning adults out of the Mental Health and Behavioral Health units into general housing. However, staffing shortages,

IT system limitations, and other implementation challenges have constrained the collection of quantitative data, making it more difficult to demonstrate impact, secure funding, and sustain the initiative long term.

DOC's ability to meet its mission is limited by obsolete IT systems. (see Chapter 3, pg. 21)
DOC IT systems support operations around the clock across Oregon including the 36-county parole and probation offices. The agency faces substantial challenges in modernizing these systems: inefficient and paper-based processes, antiquated legacy interfaces that users find cumbersome and unintuitive, and outdated programming languages that limit DOC's ability to maintain or update the systems. Years of insufficient updates have created a gap between operational needs and system capabilities, placing the agency at extreme risk of being unable to implement critical enhancements or recover effectively from system failures. Impacts on the lives and safety of adults in custody and correctional staff are thought to be severe if these systems were to fail.

What we recommend

Funding limits and delayed maintenance affect facilities across the state, and available resources are limited. DOC management can focus on strategies to address facility safety risks that interfere with rehabilitation efforts. DOC should:

1. Develop and implement a plan for moving adults in custody out of facilities that pose significant health and safety risks and have reached the end of their useful lifespan.
    a. Report to the Legislature on the risk to human life and safety if people continue to occupy unsafe facilities, such as the Oregon State Penitentiary.
2. For facilities with less urgent infrastructure concerns, develop proactive relocation strategies of the adults in custody from these facilities, in the event conditions deteriorate to uninhabitable, dangerous, or structurally condemned levels.
3. Convert unused or low-use spaces into areas that support rehabilitation, education, and other adult in custody programs.

To effectively implement reforms and outcomes for adults in custody and staff, DOC should:

4. Standardize reforms such as the Oregon Way across DOC's correctional operations through agency policy, procedure, and training standards.
5. Implement a comprehensive employee well-being and retention strategy. This could include wellness programming, peer-support resources, and trauma-informed training.
6. Improve data collection by systematically tracking the Oregon Way outcomes.

To ensure DOC maintains its ability to carry out core operations reliant upon its aging IT systems, DOC should:

7. Mitigate organizational, operational, and security risks caused by the antiquated Corrections Information System and Offender Management System.
8. Develop an exercise to simulate a catastrophic Corrections Information System failure. Emphasize the impacts to daily life, security, and operations of facility staff and incarcerated adults.
    a. Once developed, conduct and analyze the outcomes to assist in quantifying potential consequences of not modernizing the Corrections Information System. Use this analysis, where applicable, to demonstrate consequences of failure to act in future Information System Modernization Business Case documentation, and legislative presentations.
    b. Report to the Legislature on the impact to human life and safety if the system's organizational, operational, and security risks cannot be mitigated or were to occur.

Agency response

DOC agreed with all of our recommendations. The response can be found at the end of the report.

Introduction

The Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) works to safeguard communities, promote accountability, and transform the lives of incarcerated adults. DOC protects public safety by holding individuals accountable and requiring them to take personal responsibility – both for their crimes and for their behavior while in DOC custody.

Once an individual is sentenced to DOC custody, the agency is responsible for their health and safety. Adults in custody have constitutional and legal protections that help ensure fair and humane treatment, but fewer rights and avenues for justice. For the safety and well-being of adults in custody, DOC staff, and the community, it's important for the agency to ensure incarcerated individuals are treated fairly and humanely and have the opportunity for rehabilitation while in DOC custody.

Oregon DOC houses adults in custody with felony sentences over one year

DOC houses more than 12,000 adults in custody across 12 correctional facilities, generally known as prisons. These facilities are run by the DOC for people convicted of serious crimes with long-term sentences. These are distinct from jails, a short-term facility run by local authorities for people awaiting trial or serving sentences normally under a year.

Prisons operate much like small cities. Adults in custody live, eat, sleep, shower, work, recreate, rehabilitate, and receive medical treatment within these institutions. Likewise, staff spend a significant portion of their working lives within the prison walls. Most of Oregon's incarcerated individuals live in facilities that are more than 20 years old.

Figure 1: Most of Oregon DOC's 12 facilities are older than 20 years

Facility	Year Built	Bed Capacity**	April 2026 Adults in Custody	July 1, 2025 Budgeted FTE Security Positions
Deer Ridge Correctional Institution	2007	1,867	1,013	156
Warner Creek Correctional Facility	2005	496	353	66
Coffee Creek Correctional Facility	2002	1,685	1,276	305
Two Rivers Correctional Institution	1999	1,878	1,354	326
Snake River Correctional Institution	1991	3,050	2,895	622
Columbia River Correctional Institution	1990	595	509	86
Powder River Correctional Facility	1989	366	260	48
Santiam Correctional Institution	1977	440	412	73
Oregon State Correctional Institution	1959	880	823	165
South Fork Forrest Camp	1951	200	134	29
Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution	1912-13*	1,659	1,370	301
Oregon State Penitentiary	1866*	2,194	1,751	386

* Eastern Oregon under DOC in 1985; State Penitentiary's original buildings dated back to 1866 - most housing units built in 1950s.
** Bed capacity includes inactive or unbudgeted beds that could be used if resources for staff, furniture, and equipment were available. For example, in 2023 DOC had 950 such beds at Deer Ridge.

DOC is primarily funded through the state's General Fund. For the 2025-27 biennium, the Legislature approved approximately $2.7 billion in total funding, of which almost $2.59 billion comes from the General Fund. In the same biennium, DOC was allocated funding for 4,823 staffing positions, with the Operations Division receiving 68%, or 3,274, of those positions.

Most of DOC's facilities operate near maximum capacity, with most cells housing two people. Certain special housing units must stay single cells because of the needs and risks of the people living there.

Based on 2025-27 current service level budget, it costs DOC an estimated $218.36 per day to incarcerate one person, a 50% increase from $145.44 per day in the 2021–23 biennium. The actual daily cost varies from prison to prison based on things such as the facility's age, staff seniority, population size, programs offered, and security level. These numbers are a snapshot in time and can change as prison populations and budgets shift.

Figure 2: DOC's biennial budget and staffing increased steadily over the past decade

Biennium	2017-19	2019-21	2021-23	2023-25	2025-27
Total budget funding	$1,768,193,498	$1,954,732,053	$2,169,400,424	$2,310,885,292	$2,589,765,111
Total staff positions	4,605	4,731	4,781	4,813	4,823

Source: Legislative Fiscal Office's Legislative Adopted Budgets

Three of DOC's divisions directly support adults in custody daily. The Operations Division is responsible for the security and day-to-day operations of all 12 adult correctional facilities. The division oversees institution operations, security services, food service, work programs, and transportation.

The Health Services Division is responsible for providing medical, dental, behavioral health, and pharmacy care to all adults in custody, ensuring it meets community standards. Care is delivered through a managed care model that includes on-site primary care, limited access to specialists, and a restricted list of medications. DOC medical staff provide over 2,400 patient visits daily across the state and operate six infirmaries with 94 total beds. Behavioral Health Services can treat up to 264 men and 175 women at a time, focusing on those with serious or long-term mental illness.

Most incarcerated adults will be released back into their communities

According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 95% of individuals incarcerated in the U.S. will return to their communities. This statistic underscores the need for correctional systems to prepare individuals for successful reintegration.

The Correctional Services Division is responsible for programming aimed at reducing the risk of future criminal conduct. Programs include workforce development, such as education, cognitive skills, and life skills training. DOC works to prepare adults in custody for successful reentry into the community upon release and to reduce recidivism. This division also administers religious services, sentence computation, adult in custody classification, victim services, and offender records.

Information Technology Services are critical to DOC's operations

DOC Information Technology Services provide support for users across all 12 institutions, multiple administrative sites, and all 36-county parole and probation offices. They develop and maintain software and databases that support the management of adults in custody, including sentencing, security threat management, and case management. Their work also supports programming such as work assignments and education, as well as essential business functions like budgeting, finance, and operational metrics.

The unit has a $32 million budget per biennium that funds 86 full-time IT staff that supports approximately:

- 12,000 adults in custody accessing legal libraries, education, and other online services
- 4,800 DOC staff
- 1,300 county community corrections staff

These systems and services are utilized 24 hours a day, seven days a week across Oregon. As of 2024, most agency applications were custom-built in-house on outdated platforms; however, DOC has plans to replace many of these with more modern, vendor-supported, commercial off-the-shelf and cloud-based solutions.

Prison reform is essential for addressing the physical and mental health challenges of incarcerated individuals

One of DOC's responsibilities is providing health care for its incarcerated adults. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1976 that deliberate indifference to serious medical needs violates the Constitution's prohibition against "cruel and unusual punishment."

Hospitalizations – driven by aging adults in custody, complex medical needs, and high security costs – now consume a growing share of correctional health budgets.

Off-site health care is one-quarter of DOC health care costs

DOC estimates approximately 98% of health care services are provided on-site at DOC facilities. However, the remaining 2% of services – those delivered off-site – can account for up to one-quarter of the Health Services Division's total spending in any given biennium.

Serious mental illness remains widespread both nationally and statewide. U.S. prisons and jails take in far more people with severe mental disorders than psychiatric hospitals, and many receive little or no treatment.

Despite these challenges, reform is achievable. From 2016 to 2020, Disability Rights Oregon and DOC transformed the Behavioral Health Unit at the Oregon State Penitentiary into a safer, more therapeutic environment, demonstrating that meaningful mental health improvements are possible even in maximum security. This was accomplished through a formal four-year long partnership between the Oregon State Penitentiary and Disability Rights Oregon. Goals of this partnership included more effective mental healthcare, a drop in the use of force against those in custody, and a decrease in incidents of self-harm and attempted suicide. By 2019, conditions in the Behavioral Unit had markedly improved – adults in custody

spent over 20 hours per week out of their cells, residence in these units were shorter, regular transfers to less restrictive units occurred, and incidents of extreme self-harm and traumatic extractions became rare.[1]

Yet Oregon still faces a mounting mental health crisis inside its prisons. Staff report that adults in custody are exhibiting more acute symptoms than ever before, but the system has not evolved to meet these escalating needs – highlighting the need for more accessible and effective mental health care across all DOC facilities.

Nationwide and in Oregon, prisons are moving toward system-wide culture change that emphasizes mental health as a meaningful part of rehabilitation

Correctional facilities across the United States have implemented programs that provide interventions aimed at addressing trauma, mental health disorders, substance abuse, and socioeconomic inequities among incarcerated adults. The main goal of these programs has been to support rehabilitation and reentry for those who are incarcerated.

Several states have begun investing in broader initiatives designed to transform overall prison culture. These efforts seek to improve correctional environments not only for incarcerated individuals, but also for the correctional officers who work in these settings.

At many facilities in Oregon and across the country, prison culture continues to reflect a traditional command-and-control model: characterized by rigid hierarchies, limited autonomy, and adversarial relationships between staff and those incarcerated.[2] Prison reform professionals say that correctional practices remain overly focused on sanctions and enforcement, with limited mental health integration and outdated systems of governance.

Studies have shown that command-and-control practices harm both incarcerated adults and correctional officers. For incarcerated adults, these practices create fear, trauma, and barriers to rehabilitation. Healthier prison cultures support positive social behaviors, constructive interpersonal skills, and better prepare incarcerated adults for reentry to society.

For correctional officers, strict command-and-control environments with prolonged, intense stress can seriously affect their mental and physical health and make it harder for them to do their job. Research links chronic work-related stress to shorter life expectancy, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and more punitive attitudes toward adults in custody.

> "It is forgotten that the vast majority of the nearly [13,000] men and women housed by DOC will be released from custody. These previously incarcerated individuals will one day grocery shop alongside us and our families, they will share the freeways and live in our neighborhoods. Humanizing and normalizing prisons benefits us all."
>
> *— Department of Corrections webpage, on The Oregon Way*

[1] Disability Rights Oregon - Four Years Later: Oregon Prison Overhauls Treatment of Inmates with Serious Mental Illness

[2] Prison culture refers to the values, norms, behaviors, and social structures that develop among people living or working within a prison environment. It shapes the experiences of both incarcerated individuals and correctional staff.

DOC developed its own prison culture-change initiative

The Oregon Way is DOC's prison reform initiative aimed at transforming prison culture. The Oregon Way seeks to improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals by creating a more normalized correctional environment and focusing on employee health and wellbeing.

The initiative draws inspiration from the correctional culture of Norway. In 2017, leaders from Oregon's DOC, legislators, and the Criminal Justice Commission joined the U.S.-European Criminal Justice Innovation Program, visiting prisons in Norway and meeting with correctional leaders from Norway, Sweden, and Ireland to learn about humane strategies for confinement conditions, treatment, diversion and reentry programs.

The Oregon Way posits that by authentically engaging with people housed in general population, reducing reliance on segregation, and effectively managing behavior to transition individuals out of isolation, DOC will create a safer environment for both staff and adults in custody. The measures of success include improvements in officer health and well-being, increased job satisfaction, reductions in staff turnover, dramatic reductions in the use of restrictive housing and similar disciplinary actions, and a reduction in all measures of recidivism.

Other states have implemented similar programs, including Washington, California, Connecticut, and North Dakota. A 2021 study found that after officers in North Dakota began using Norwegian normalization principles and mediation, the result was a 74% decline in the use of solitary confinement, and improved health and wellness for staff and incarcerated people.[3]

The Oregon Way

The Oregon Way promotes positive and healthy organizational culture within correctional institutions. It empowers staff to engage actively with adults in custody, guiding them toward rehabilitation and successful reintegration. By implementing innovative approaches and enhancing conditions, it aims to improve outcomes for both staff and adults in our custody.

— Department of Corrections webpage on The Oregon Way

States with similar initiatives have received varying levels of legislative support. Washington launched its version, the Washington Way, in 2019 with $75,000 in initial funding. In 2023, the Washington Governor proposed $12.7 million to hire 52 additional program staff.

As an agency-led initiative, Oregon Way activities, staffing, and training are supported entirely through internal DOC resources.[4] While DOC initially received some grant funding, the reform remains in the early stage of implementation.

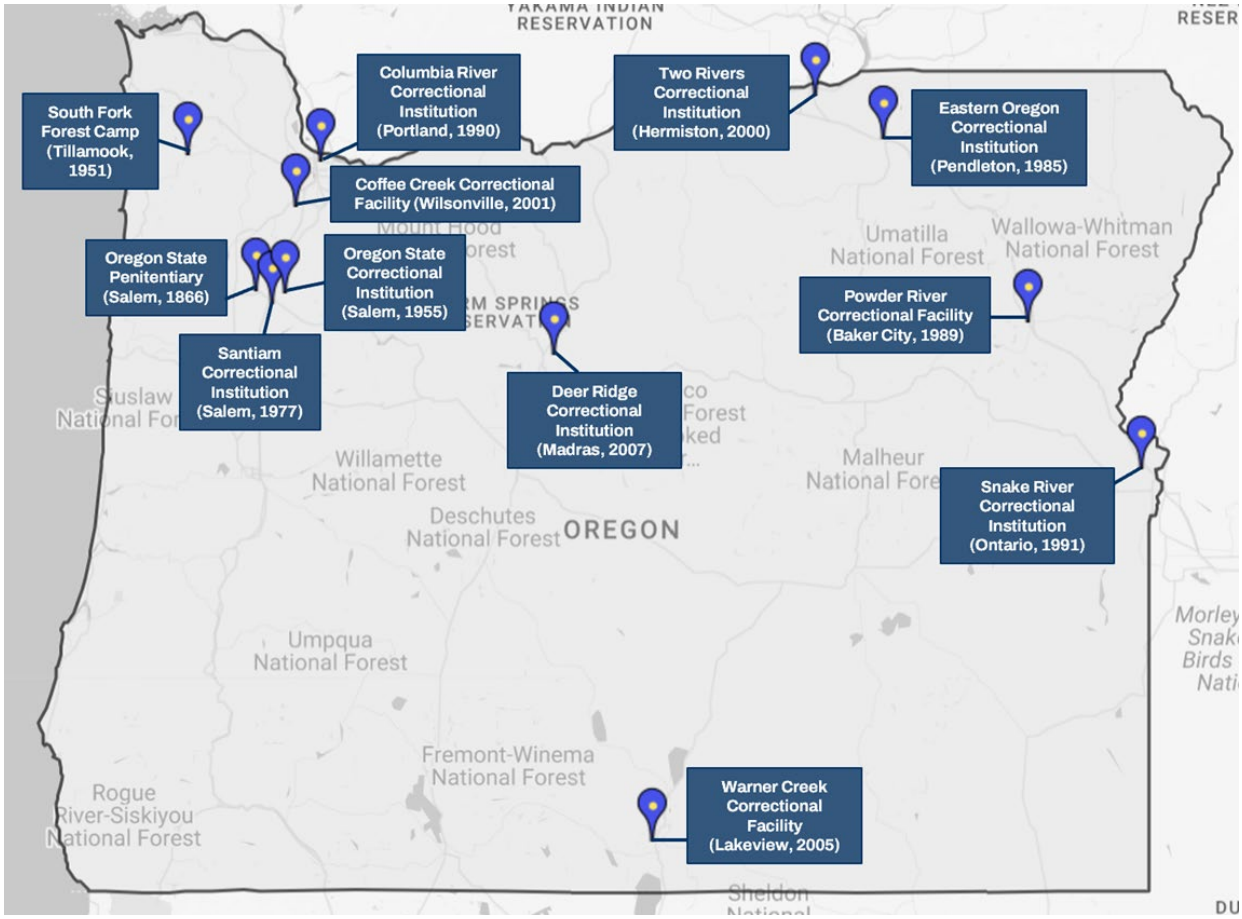
[3] Health and Justice, "A case study of the quest to end solitary confinement in North Dakota."

[4] DOC contracted with Amend, a University of California San Francisco-based, physician-led program, to implement the Oregon Way. Amend has also partnered with other states implementing similar reforms. While the contract with Amend was slated to continue until December 31, 2024, DOC ended its contract with Amend early due to staffing issues. The final payment on November 14, 2024, officially closed the agreement.

As prison populations change, so does the need to build new facilities or maintain existing ones

Between 1998 and 2008, Oregon added more than 7,800 prison beds. The incarcerated population began declining in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and clemency releases, and DOC closed two minimum-security prisons in the 2021-23 biennium.

Figure 3: Geographic distribution of Oregon Department of Corrections facilities by year opened



Prison bed needs have long been driven by sentencing policies, population trends, and crime rates, with major policy shifts – including the 1989 sentencing grid, 1995's Measure 11, and later laws targeting repeat offenders – fueling rapid growth. This expansion also spurred changes in how prison locations were selected. Beginning in 1989, legislation gave DOC broad authority to evaluate sites based on environmental, architectural, and social criteria. While these processes helped accommodate a soaring population, many minimum-security prisons were built in remote areas, creating long-term barriers to health care access, family connections, education, and employment opportunities.

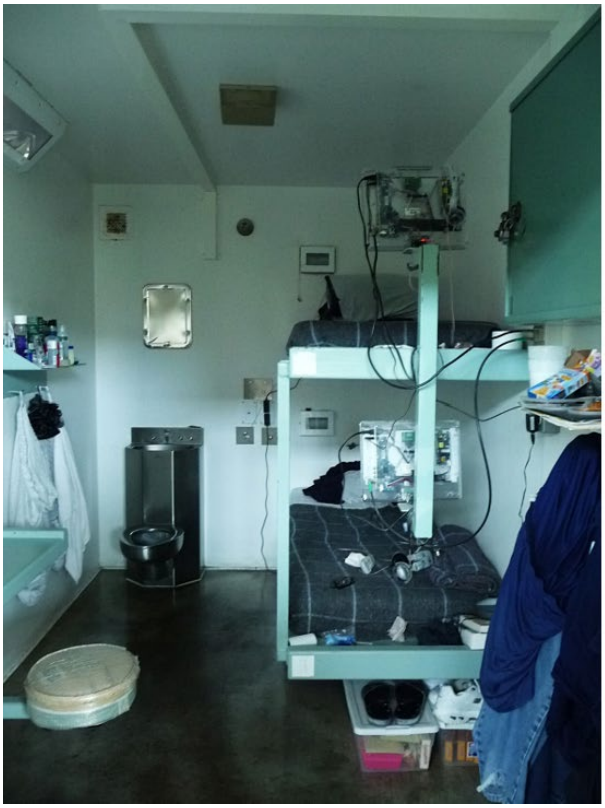
Ballot measures and legislative reforms are beginning to shift the system toward treatment and community-based alternatives. As the state shifts toward more humane, rehabilitation-focused models – and with 2018 forecasts predicting sustained population decline – Oregon is reevaluating where prisons should be located and how they can better support successful reentry.

Supportive physical environments are critical to rehabilitation

"The quality of our physical environment can be health giving or health destroying. Therefore, while staffing levels, security factors, education and employment opportunities are important determinants of a facility's culture and climate, and high-quality healthcare and psychology provision are crucial for prisoners' chances of recovery from short- and long-term health problems, equally significant to the shaping of a (relatively) healthy or unhealthy carceral experience are a building's age, architecture, location, interior design and exterior landscaping."

— Designing 'Healthy' Prisons for Women (2019),Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health

The physical condition of Oregon's prisons presents significant challenges. Rapid construction in the 1990s emphasized cost-efficient, standardized designs. A 2020 Facility Strategic Plan identified $568.5 million in deferred maintenance and capital improvement needs, 84% of it as urgent. Pandemic-era budget constraints allowed only the most critical repairs to proceed, leaving substantial infrastructure needs unmet.



Incentive (privilege) housing unit at Two Rivers Correctional Institution, where eligible adults in custody can live.
Source: Auditor photo taken during site visit.

Entrance to the Oregon State Penitentiary.
Source: Auditor photo taken during site visit.

Audit Results

Many people enter prison with significant health and social challenges that are often worsened by incarceration. At the same time, many of DOC's facilities, including the Oregon State Penitentiary – built without modern standards – are creating uncomfortable and sometimes life-threatening conditions. Most custody facilities are rated in poor condition and face a substantial and rapidly growing deferred maintenance backlog; dorms and cells in some locations fail to meet national standards for natural light, temperature, accessibility, and design for adults with disabilities. Deferred maintenance costs have surged from $568.5 million in 2020 to almost $861 million in 2024, far outpacing legislative funding and continuing to rise without timely intervention.

The agency's Oregon Way initiative and other reforms could improve both staff wellness and rehabilitation outcomes for adults in custody. But significant challenges such as mandatory overtime and burnout pose substantial challenges to DOC's ability to fully implement these reforms. Additionally, the offender management IT system is outdated and difficult to modify, limiting the agency's ability to make data-informed decisions. Implementation of Oregon Way is fairly recent, and DOC does not yet have comprehensive data to demonstrate its efficacy. DOC needs to improve data collection to track outcomes and identify gaps.

DOC has a responsibility to thousands of Oregonians in its custody as well as to its staff. Adults in custody are a vulnerable population, with fewer rights, fewer avenues to seek accountability when those rights are violated, and a total reliance on the prison system to keep them safe, alive, and healthy. Since one of DOC's goals is successful reentry to society, DOC must address these gaps to protect and prepare incarcerated Oregonians in its care.

Chapter One: Facility Deferred Maintenance and Adult Safety

DOC's nearly $861 million maintenance backlog puts incarcerated adults at risk

Nationally, many people enter prison with significant challenges, and the stress of incarceration can worsen these conditions. Meanwhile, many of Oregon's outdated facilities – built without modern standards – are poorly lit, poorly ventilated, and dangerously hot, with limited visibility and obsolete control systems, creating uncomfortable and sometimes life-threatening conditions.

Additionally, DOC custody facilities face a substantial backlog of deferred maintenance and needed upgrades, not including seismic upgrades, and all but two facilities rated in poor condition. In some facilities, dormitory rooms and cells do not meet national standards for access to natural light, temperature, and design, specifically for adults with disabilities.[5]

The agency's deferred maintenance costs are growing quickly, far outpacing the funding allocated to them by the Legislature. In 2020, the total cost of DOC's deferred maintenance backlog was $568.5 million. That number grew to almost $861 million a few years later– and will only continue to grow if not addressed timely.[6]

Deferred Maintenance

Deferred maintenance is defined as the amount needed but not yet expended for repairs, restoration, or rehabilitation of an asset. Often, these delays are an attempt to save costs, meet budget funding limitations, or realign budget funds. Lack of funding can cause neglect and result in what was originally minor repair work evolving into more serious conditions.

Aging facilities endanger older incarcerated adults and those with disabilities

Many individuals already face health, social, and economic challenges before entering prison. Often, the stresses of the prison environment exacerbate these health issues. Research shows each year spent in prison can reduce a person's life expectancy by about two years.[7] Due to these health impacts, incarcerated individuals age 50 and older are widely considered the threshold for defining the aging prison population – a population that is increasing.

National statistics show in 2015, Oregon had the fourth highest percentage of adults in custody aged 55 or older. As of January 2023, 17.4% of Oregon's incarcerated adults were 55 or older. The cost to manage and treat aging adults in custody can be two to three times higher than younger offenders.

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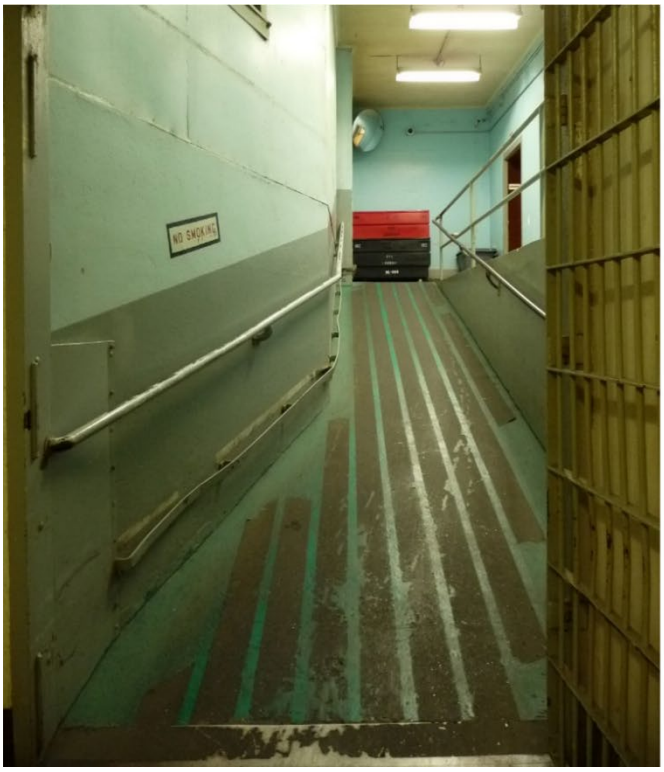
[5] According to American Correctional Association standards.

[6] As of December 2024, accounting for inflation. In 2023, the amount was $823 million. As of May 2026, DOC is amidst an updated facilities condition assessment, the deferred maintenance backlog figure is expected to change.

[7] Patterson EJ (2013). The dose-response of time served in prison on mortality: New York, 1989–2003. American Journal of Public Health, 103(3), 523–528.

The age and condition of Oregon's facilities have led to living conditions that are, at best, uncomfortable – at worst, deadly. Many older facilities, built without modern correctional standards, are stifling and dimly lit.[8] Cells lack windows and have limited space, which contributes to feelings of confinement and stagnation. Door and cell control systems are severely outdated, and staff have poor visibility, particularly in corner cells, leading to safety and supervision challenges. Natural light is scarce, negatively affecting incarcerated adults' orientation to time of day, and summer heat makes living and working areas unsafe.



The Oregon State Penitentiary ramp to shower area is steep and creates accessibility issues.
Source: Auditor photo taken during a site visit.

State Penitentiary Old pipes are gradually being replaced because of water quality and safety issues.
Source: Auditor photo taken during a site visit.

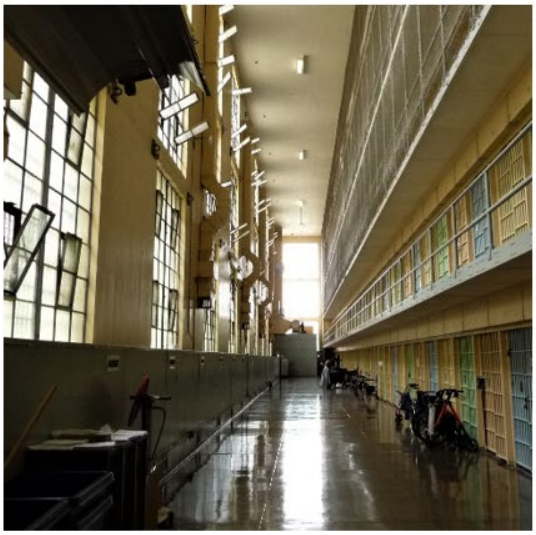
At the Oregon State Penitentiary, interior temperatures soar past 90 degrees. Prison staff told auditors that some individuals in custody throw personal items from their cells at the windows in an attempt to break them and improve air flow. Some facilities lack air conditioning entirely. Others, like Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, rely on swamp coolers that are not well suited for Oregon's climate. The elderly, especially vulnerable to extreme temperatures, face the greatest danger in these conditions, with increased risk of experiencing heatstroke and cardiovascular strain.

Additionally, many accommodations that exist for elderly or disabled adults in custody are inadequate. Some of Oregon's prisons were designed decades ago and are ill-equipped to meet these evolving needs. For example, the Oregon State Penitentiary has a single outdated elevator that does not serve all floors, creating accessibility challenges, such as lack of access to services such as law library, chapel, education, and counseling. Additionally, some housing units are not accessible to individuals using walkers or

[8] The American Correctional Association establishes standards to ensure staff and incarcerated adults' safety and security. When it comes to living conditions, these standards specify that rooms or cells should provide access to natural light, and indoor living and work area temperatures must be maintained within appropriate comfort zones for both summer and winter.

wheelchairs, as they cannot fit through cell doorways.[9] This poses significant safety risks for individuals who use mobility aids to exit their cells quickly during emergencies or even in routine situations. At the same facility, the shower units are located at the bottom of a steep ramp that can be difficult for disabled individuals to navigate.

The spaces designated for providing health care are also substandard, to the point of potentially jeopardizing the health and safety of not only adults in custody, but also correctional staff. Existing medical infrastructure across Oregon's prisons is inadequate, overcrowded, and ill-equipped to provide necessary clinical, acute, and long-term care - particularly for the expanding population aged 55 and older.



Cells at Oregon State Penitentiary do not accommodate mobility devices like wheelchairs and walkers, so they must be stored outside cells.
Source: Auditor photo taken during a site visit.

State Penitentiary infirmary is cramped with minimal storage options, not conducive to rehabilitation.
Source: Auditor photo taken during a site visit.

For example, the infirmary at the Oregon State Penitentiary is small, crowded, and hard to access, posing safety risks and hindering care. It suffers from numerous issues, including leaky roofs and an inadequate heating and cooling system. Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution faces severe space shortages and lacks proper clinic rooms, forcing staff to work in unsuitable areas. Management reported that medical space was their biggest challenge, and they acknowledged they do not have a clear solution. And Columbia River Correctional Institution also struggles with insufficient medical and mental health spaces and has no room for expansion due to surrounding property constraints.

For federal prisons, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons mandates adults in custody medical examinations be conducted privately in adequately equipped rooms with proper space, running water, seating, medical supplies, and access to electronic health records. Examination areas must be regularly cleaned and disinfected, with biohazard controls and personal protective equipment available, and the same standards apply to satellite or remote locations.

According to best practices in correctional health care, approximately 2% of a system's incarcerated population needs medical housing. Oregon is not aligned with this practice. As of April 2026, Oregon's

[9] American Correctional Association standards specify adults in custody with disabilities should be housed in units designed to accommodate their needs. Additionally, all programs and services must be accessible to aging and disabled adults in custody.

incarcerated population totaled 12,150, meaning facilities should be able to provide medical housing for 243 individuals. DOC facilities previously haven't met this standard; for instance, in 2020, only 86 existed.

The Oregon State Penitentiary on path to become functionally obsolete

Due to its age and backlog of needed maintenance, the Oregon State Penitentiary will become functionally obsolete in the near future, regardless of deferred maintenance efforts. The cost of replacement will only increase. Management at the facility noted no preventative maintenance is being performed; the facility is operating at capacity and only conducting repairs and replacements as needed.

This century-old facility is no longer suitable for modern correctional, medical, or rehabilitative needs. Its outdated infrastructure poses significant safety, health, and accessibility challenges for both staff and the almost 1,800 incarcerated adults it houses. DOC's 2020 Facility Strategic Plan identified a need for over 250,000 square feet of additional housing and program space to meet current American Correctional Association standards.

The facility also experiences regular emergency failures, including sewer line breaks, boiler outages, and inaccessible critical services, which have pushed maintenance costs beyond $200 million, and which are expected to grow exponentially. Many areas are not compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act standards and lack proper ventilation and fire suppression systems, while high temperatures and failing HVAC systems create unsafe living and working conditions.

Education and training programs, crucial for effective rehabilitation, face critical space challenges

Approximately 95% of incarcerated adults will return to their communities. DOC is constitutionally required to facilitate the rehabilitation of those in its custody. However, many facilities lack sufficient programming and educational space, undermining these efforts.

Americans with Disabilities Act regulations require that public entities ensure adults in custody with disabilities are not discriminated against, denied benefits, or excluded from programs, services, or activities for which they are eligible. Adults in custody with disabilities must have equal access to both mandatory and voluntary programs, including education, vocational training, religious services, work release, and visitation.

But many facilities struggle to provide sufficient space. For example, Two Rivers Correctional Institution has outgrown its programming space and requires additional areas to accommodate its needs. The only available space for expansion is a large workforce development space occupied by Oregon Corrections Enterprises.

Facilities like Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution have found ways to work around existing maintenance needs. For example, in February 2025, Eastern Oregon was operating with four of its 19 housing units closed due to staffing shortages. The facility used this as an opportunity to rotate adults in custody through other units that required deferred maintenance, allowing staff to complete remodeling and maintenance projects.

Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution also completes structural projects by employing adults in custody in apprenticeship programs, including electrical, plumbing, painting, and metals. The institution includes several in-house programs and labor resources to support the necessary repairs, allowing them to complete projects at a lower cost without relying entirely on outside contractors. Despite this, the facility struggles to complete projects on schedule due to a shortage of journeymen to lead apprentice work and an extended approval process for external contractors.

Other facilities may not be able to use apprentice work in the same way due to limited programming space and resources, location constraints, insufficient access to journeymen, or factors related to the prison population such as security level, age, or ability.

Asbestos tiles, chipped lead paint, mold, mildew and water damage appeared throughout the Oregon State Penitentiary.
Source: Auditor photo taken during a site visit.

Budget requests and allocations don't fully cover the cost of deferred maintenance for DOC facilities, most of which are rated in poor condition

In 2020 and 2023, DOC contracted with outside engineering firms to assess how much it would cost to fix various facilities compared to how much it would be to replace them.[10] The assessment then assigned a condition rating of good, fair, poor, or replacement depending on how high the repair costs were. According to this assessment, ten of DOC's twelve facilities were rated in poor condition – meaning the cost of repairing them would be anywhere from 10% to 50% of the cost to replace them.

[10] DLR Group and CGL

Figure 4: All but two of DOC's facilities in 2023 were rated in poor condition

Under 5% = **Good** Between 5% and 10% = **Fair** Between 10% and 50% = **Poor** Over 60% = **Replacement**

Facility	2023 Score	2023 Condition Rating
Coffee Creek Correctional Facility	10%	FAIR
Columbia River Correctional Institution	19%	POOR
Deer Ridge Correctional Institution	10%	FAIR
Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution	17%	POOR
Oregon State Correctional Institution	24%	POOR
Oregon State Penitentiary	17%	POOR
Powder River Correctional Facility	15%	POOR
Santiam Correctional Institution	12%	POOR
Snake River Correctional Institution	16%	POOR
South Fork Forest Camp	20%	POOR
Two Rivers Correctional Institution	17%	POOR
Warner Creek Correctional Facility	29%	POOR

Source: DOC 2023 Facility Strategic Plan

According to DOC management, previous assessments of deferred maintenance focused on surface level issues. These assessments didn't include infrastructure such as underground pipes and components concealed behind walls, meaning the actual deferred maintenance backlog is likely much higher.

State agencies, such as education, human services, and public safety, rely on the General Fund as a shared and finite resource. Each budget cycle, the Legislature must weigh competing priorities and make difficult decisions about how limited funds are allocated across agencies and programs. During the 2025-27 biennium, DOC sought to address part of its deferred maintenance by initially requesting $110 million but was unable to request this amount due to budget restrictions. According to a DOC administrator, the actual level of funding needed was closer to $250 million per biennium for the next three biennia, but the agency would likely require additional staffing to manage those projects. The Governor's Recommended Budget included $70 million; ultimately, the Legislature approved $50 million.

Resolving the deferred maintenance backlog would likely save the state money long-term. Replacing equipment after it has unexpectedly failed can cost 80% to 90% more than it would to replace that equipment at the scheduled time. For example, DOC management shared the Oregon State Penitentiary's emergency boiler replacement project cost roughly twice what a planned replacement would have, in addition to the $100,000 per month cost for a temporary boiler.

During the 2025 legislative session, DOC requested $5 million in funding for phase one of its plan to replace the Oregon State Penitentiary and create a centralized geriatric medical facility to address growing health care needs for the aging incarcerated population. Eventually, the Legislature approved $3 million. DOC management warned this amount would be insufficient to fully fund the planning phase. After the planning phase is complete, DOC plans to seek funding over the next three biennia for design, engineering, contracting, and construction.

At the Oregon State Penitentiary, a temporary boiler costs $100,000 per month to operate.
Source: Auditor photo taken during a site visit.

Old broken and poorly insulated windows at State Penitentiary offer little protection from extreme temperatures.
Source: Auditor photo taken during a site visit.

Beyond deferred maintenance, DOC has other costs to plan for, like seismic retrofitting its buildings. In September 2025, the Governor required agencies to strengthen the seismic resilience of state-owned buildings.[11] Under this order, four DOC facilities (in Figure 5) would likely be rendered obsolete, requiring replacement. The 2023 Facility Strategic Plan did not evaluate the specific seismic retrofitting need for DOC facilities, though it did provide a perspective on which facilities would need attention and investment in this area.

Figure 5: As of 2023, four DOC facilities would likely require replacement due to seismic retrofit expense

Facility	2023 Score with Seismic Budget	Estimated Retrofit Expense
Oregon State Penitentiary	21% (POOR)	$22,635,000
Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution	20% (POOR)	$17,360,000
Oregon State Correctional Institution	28% (POOR)	$10,766,000
Santiam Correctional Institution	16% (POOR)	$3,579,000
Total		**$54,340,000**

Source: DOC 2023 Facility Strategic Plan (figures adjusted for 2027 dollars)

Deferred facility maintenance significantly affects adults in custody, impacting their health, safety, rehabilitation, and overall well-being. For example, at the Oregon State Penitentiary, there is poor air quality, unsafe conditions, and temperature extremes that, in some cases, can lead to serious health concerns. The facility's structural hazards, accessibility limitations, and non-functional fire suppression systems create safety risks and could result in catastrophic emergency system failures. Deferring critical repairs can lead to unplanned emergency repairs, creating challenges and interruptions in daily operations, e.g., disrupted services due to closed units, or closed rehabilitative spaces. And each of these risks leads to staff burnout and high turnover – undermining critical Oregon Way efforts to rehabilitate adults in custody.

[11] Executive Order No. 25-22,Constructing Seismically Resilient State Buildings

Reform shows promise but is undermined by mandatory overtime and staff burnout

The Oregon Way initiative, led by DOC, seeks to create a more normalized correctional environment and culture that supports better outcomes for incarcerated individuals. While the program remains in its early stages, preliminary results of the Oregon Way reforms suggest improvements in conditions for both staff and adults in custody. Despite some promising qualitative results, staffing, IT system limitations, and implementation challenges have limited quantitative data collection, hindering efforts to secure funding and sustain Oregon Way activities.

Significant mandatory overtime and burnout limit rehabilitative programming

DOC is struggling with persistent vacancies among security staff at many of Oregon's correctional facilities. These vacancies lead to an overreliance on overtime, put stress on the existing staff, and challenge DOC's ability to fully implement the Oregon Way reforms.

Figure 6: High security staff overtime at DOC's largest facilities presents challenges

Facility	Capacity*	Avg. Daily Pop.	All Security OT Hours
Coffee Creek Correctional Facility	1,795	1,211	9,110
Columbia River Correctional Institution	595	522	108
Deer Ridge Correctional Institution	980	948	332
Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution	1,658	1,298	6,832
Oregon State Correctional Institution	884	857	148
Oregon State Penitentiary	2,130	1,759	416
Powder River Correctional Facility	316	261	28
Santiam Correctional Institution	480	348	49
Snake River Correctional Institution	3,059	2,907	284
South Fork Forest Camp	200	165	0
Two Rivers Correctional Institution	1,670	1,209	7,832
Warner Creek Correctional Facility	407	391	101
Totals	**14,174**	**11,876**	**25,240**

Source: DOC June 2024 Institution and Overtime Table
*Note: Capacity refers to active use beds/budgeted capacity

In June 2024, out of an estimated 2,468 security positions across all facilities, 254 of them were vacant. Two Rivers Correctional Institution, Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, and Coffee Creek

Correctional Facility represented nearly 65% of the total security staff vacancies during this period.[12] That same month, security staff across all DOC facilities logged 25,240 overtime hours, 94% of which were at these same three institutions.

Several factors contribute to high vacancy rates. Leadership and staff at these correctional institutions attribute the vacancy rate to, among other reasons, low pay, and poor working conditions. The lengthy hiring process – which takes an average of 125 days – means almost half of applicants drop out during the recruitment process. The COVID-19 pandemic also hit these facilities especially hard. In 2021, employees worked over 500,000 hours of overtime.

DOC leadership is exploring other solutions to address staffing challenges and adapt to the evolving corrections landscape, such as offering hiring and referral bonuses, adding step pay increases to reward longevity among security staff, and implementing other programs to improve workplace culture.

Given the high stress and demands of corrections work, it's critical to adopt a holistic and integrated approach to employee well-being, safety, and retention. According to DOC, some targeted retention initiatives over the last few years have helped, such as an employee recognition program, wellness initiatives, and leadership development. However, DOC still does not have a comprehensive strategy to address well-being and retention across the 12 facilities.

Despite some progress, DOC reports it still needs to employ 261 additional security staff to operate without the use of mandatory overtime, based on current population levels and facility capacity.[13] Additionally, DOC faces a retiring workforce, which places a strain on remaining staff. Without resolving these staffing challenges, it's unlikely DOC can sustain efforts associated with the Oregon Way.

For instance, as of July 2025, the Oregon State Penitentiary had five funded staff dedicated to its Resource Team. At all other institutions, similar work is carried out through volunteer and overtime work. DOC Oregon Way leadership says having a dedicated team at each institution is crucial, as stable and trusting relationships are foundational to supporting higher-risk incarcerated adults.

Staffing shortages affect not only those in custody but their families as well. Facility managers' report that family visitation hours at many of the facilities had to be limited due to staffing shortages. Providing ample visitation opportunities with family is critical for normalization, helping adults in custody maintain their identity, mental health, and social connections – all key factors in successful reintegration.

Lockdowns, once reserved for emergencies, are sometimes used to address staff shortages. During lockdown, adults in custody can be confined in their cells for 23 or more hours a day, and programming, work, and recreational activities are often cancelled or limited.

Mandatory overtime continues to undermine reforms and limit the agency's capacity to expand them. To sustain and deepen its reform efforts, each facility will need staffing levels that support safe operations while improving outcomes for both adults in custody and staff.

[12] In June 2024, Two Rivers Correctional Institution with 13.8%, Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution with 26%, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility with 24.8%.
[13] As of August 2024.

Reform seeks to improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals and employee well-being by normalizing the correctional environment

Across the country, cases show that when trust-based relationships between correctional officers and incarcerated individuals are absent, use of restrictive housing and disciplinary actions increase, mental and medical care can deteriorate, and staff burnout increases. Poor communication and siloed systems can delay treatment and weaken coordinated care for those incarcerated. Heightened institutional tension and stress increase the likelihood of crises, violence, and stress-related illness. As a result, care and rehabilitation efforts for incarcerated adults can become more reactive than preventive, less responsive, and ultimately less effective.

Modern prison reform models are shifting away from punitive, command-and-control approaches toward rehabilitative strategies that seek to more effectively identify and address trauma, mental health disorders, and substance abuse, supporting successful rehabilitation and reentry for incarcerated adults.

Oregon has its own prison culture reform initiative called the Oregon Way. The Oregon Way seeks to create a more normalized correctional environment and culture that supports better outcomes for incarcerated individuals and staff. A key component of the Oregon Way is establishing teams with specialized roles to target different challenge areas.

Each Oregon correctional facility is at a different stage of reform implementation. Many facilities have established one or more types of specialized teams. Specialized teams include Activity Teams and Resource Teams who focus on high-risk individuals with the goal of increasing out-of-cell time, providing structured engagement, and reducing reliance on restrictive housing, with Resource Teams offering more intensive specialized support. Other types of teams include teams of Contact Officers, Isolation Reduction Teams, and Peer Support Teams – all of which have a goal of fostering a more supportive correctional environment by reintegrating individuals in special housing, providing peer mentorship during crises and offering proactive guidance and resources.

Working with a Contact Officer was a humanizing experience for Timothy

Timothy is an adult in custody at Columbia River Correctional Institution who graduated from the Contact Officer Support Program in spring 2025. During his time with the program, he received guidance and support from Contact Officers to overcome barriers and set a plan for the future.

"This program helped me to be okay with my emotions, it helped to realize that my joy is my job, that my attitude is my assignment and ultimately that my stability is my responsibility. […] The Contact Officer Support Program helped me challenge my defaults. It expanded my capacity for pressure. It helped me learn to pick and choose my battles. This program has enabled me to make a positive impact to this community. [This] made me think, if I can lead and be a positive role model amongst my peers in this community, then imagine the impact I can make in the community of Portland, Oregon. […]

"The Contact Officer Support Program helped me to trust those in authority, which is a miracle in itself. I feel human again. This program helped me keep myself accountable. This program taught me not to hide the part where I ached. I learned that I am not the sum of my mistakes. I'm a believer that a man cannot carry out change on his own. How to change must be learned. It is learned from the wisdom of others, and lessons are gleaned through one's life experiences."

— Timothy, Adult in Custody at Columbia River Correctional Institution

When auditors toured DOC facilities, it was clear that these operational changes were still in their early development. However, staff shared several examples with auditors indicating this reform has already contributed to a less volatile and more rehabilitative environment in corrections facilities. A nine-year correctional officer observed a reduction in the number of cell extractions – forced removal of an adult in custody from their cell when the individual is posing a threat or otherwise uncooperative. A correctional officer in a high-risk unit at Snake River Correctional Institution noticed an improvement in his personal life and less mental exhaustion from work.

While several facilities like Columbia River and Eastern Oregon Correctional Institutions had been practicing many of the Oregon Way principles prior to the development of the agencywide initiative, leadership and staff noted that the Oregon Way has served as an opportunity for facilities to operationalize and standardize some of these practices. As a staff person at Eastern Oregon phrased it "we are working to codify humanization," by getting these practices incorporated into policy. DOC has also implemented mandatory training courses for correctional officers that focus on normalization practices, including dynamic security techniques. Lasting impact requires integrating the initiatives values into formal policies, operational procedures, and staff training. While steps have already been taken, continued effort is needed to fully embed and sustain this work.

Many of the officers involved in these specialized teams believe in the mission of this initiative. They are volunteering their time or working overtime, to establish these operational changes, and some progress has already been made. Since January 2023, the Oregon State Penitentiary Resource Team successfully assisted 59 incarcerated adults to transition out of the Mental Health and Behavioral Health units to general housing.

In addition to these specialized teams, facilities have been working to normalize the environment and day-to-day life for incarcerated adults. For example, Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution is working to transform their disciplinary segregation unit into a more rehabilitative environment, where people housed in these units have access to more programming.

Marcus' story working with Resource Team at Snake River Correctional Institution

"Marcus had over 18 years of living in restrictive housing. Only six months of his last 19 years have been in general population. […] He believed he was a 'marked man.' He had mentally deteriorated during this time, with a long history of suicide attempts. He had over 50 major misconduct reports during this incarceration cycle while in restrictive housing. [..]

We decided we would take him on an unrestricted walk outside as our first Resource Team activity with Marcus. This was his first time walking unrestricted in over 18 years. While we were on the walk, he was walking really close to me … I had to redirect him a few steps off to the side, and that's where he broke down in tears. He believed that because of all the bad things that he had done we were taking him out there to execute him. When he saw the gun tower, he stayed close to me because he didn't think the tower officer would risk taking a shot at him.

This really opened our eyes to how complex these cases are and the deterioration of the mind, body and soul and the effects of long-term restrictive housing. After working with him for several months we were able to transition him into a general population unit."

— Resource Team Member at Snake River Correctional Institution

While use of disciplinary segregation is decreasing, conditions in these units are still restrictive and isolating. Facilities are still figuring out how to provide programming and mental health services to the people housed in these segregation units. Leadership and staff recognize the reforms are a work in progress and subject to structural forces in the larger state correctional system that are sometimes beyond their control, like staffing shortages and funding limitations.

Although preliminary qualitative data showing the impact of the Oregon Way initiative is available, staffing shortages, IT system limitations, and other implementation challenges have so far prevented collection of comprehensive quantitative results – such as reductions in cell-time or recidivism related metrics – across all facilities. Without this data, securing additional funding and sustaining momentum for Oregon Way activities will be difficult.

Artwork created by an incarcerated adult in an art therapy space at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.
Source: Auditor photo taken during a site visit.

Artwork created by an incarcerated adult at Two Rivers Correctional Institution's metal shop.
Source: Auditor photo taken during a site visit.

Chapter Three: Obsolete Correctional IT Systems

DOC's ability to meet its mission is limited by obsolete IT systems

DOC information technology services provide support for thousands of users across all 12 institutions, multiple administrative sites, and 36 county parole and probation offices. The IT team develops and maintains software and databases that support management of adults in custody – including sentencing, security threat management, and case management – along with programming such as work assignments and education, and essential business functions like budgeting, finance, and operational metrics.

DOC is struggling to modernize its systems. In some areas, staff still use manual and paper processes that are inefficient and limit data sharing. The agency put forth three primary IT-related initiatives in their 2025-27 agency request budget; they received funding for one, partial funding for another, and no funding for the third initiative.

Our assessment was limited to the key systems discussed below. However, DOC operations rely on over 40 IT systems and applications, many of which are reported to be at end-of-life, or unsupported by vendors, and fall outside the scope of this audit.

Maintaining existing IT systems and responding to business needs could become impossible as obsolete systems continue to age

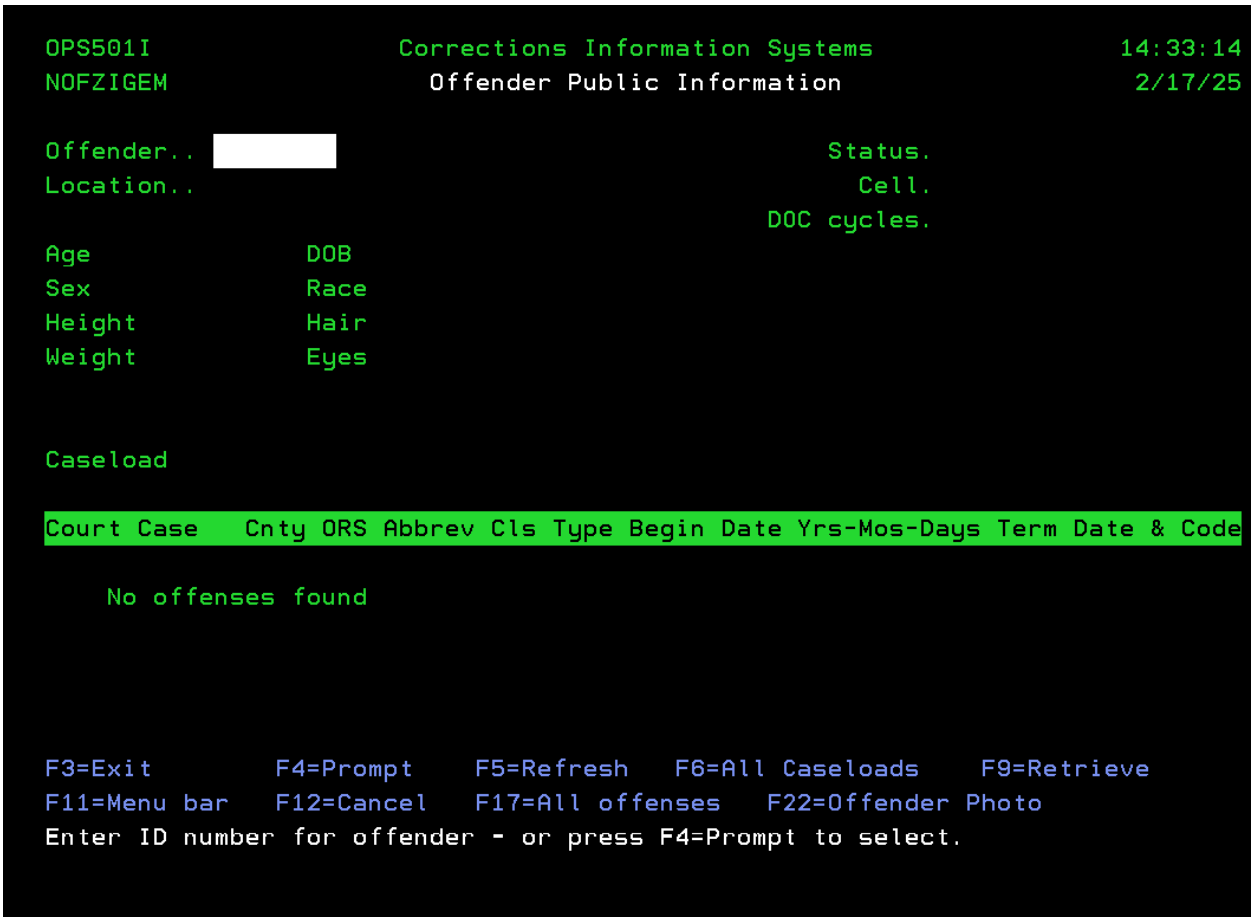
DOC's Corrections Information System and Offender Management System support all core functions necessary for managing adults in custody. These systems are relied upon for tracking information regarding adults in custody, such as what institution they're in, which cell they're housed in, court attendance, what programming they take, daily schedules, special diets, and other areas, such as information regarding visits or volunteers. The only significant category of information not contained in these systems is health records.

The Corrections Information System and its data are utilized by all of Oregon's Community Corrections departments, the Board of Parole and Post-Prison Supervision, the Oregon State Police Law Enforcement Database System, and the Justice Department, among others. A previous DOC Chief Information Officer estimated 90% of all work done by DOC staff is captured in this system.

This legacy software was originally built in 1989 in a programming language called COBOL. Finding developers with expertise in this language has become increasingly difficult, as it hasn't been taught in colleges for decades. DOC's system is built upon a Midrange iSeries platform that is no longer in widespread use – in fact, DOC is the only agency in Oregon still using it. This has resulted in rising annual licensing and maintenance costs for the equipment and operating system, as costs are no longer shared by multiple agencies.

DOC's ability to maintain and upgrade the system has been diminishing, in part because the technicians who developed the system have retired. The risk of a failure, or the inability of the agency to update the system to meet changing laws, policy, or business requirements, is increasing. Outdated user interfaces within this legacy system are said to be cumbersome, unintuitive, and result in poor user experiences and a

steep learning curve when onboarding new staff. The system still utilizes what's commonly referred to as a "green screen," a style of user interface that was replaced in most system applications many years ago.



Example screenshot of a CIS 'green screen' legacy system. | Source: DOC

Current Corrections Information System applications are not keeping up with business processes and user demand for enhanced reporting. Previously, DOC IT management stated "…[these] applications will eventually be too complex and cumbersome to enhance or will become unusable." This decreasing ability to expand functionality to meet the needs of industry change and agency growth will increase the difficulty in supporting business objectives in a cost-effective and sustainable manner.

The existing system is not web-based, incompatible with mobile devices, and lacks an intuitive user interface. DOC says the obsolescence of the software affects their work with adults in custody and threatens their capacity to reduce crime and improve outcomes. For example, auditors spoke with researchers from the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, which calculates recidivism rates. They noted that it is difficult to evaluate whether DOC programming reduces recidivism because DOC's system only tracks whether an adult in custody started a program, not how long they stayed in the program or whether they successfully completed it.

If not modernized, the system might stop working for the thousands of justice professionals who rely on it every day, resulting in the system not being able to meet its mission or help support statewide public safety initiatives.

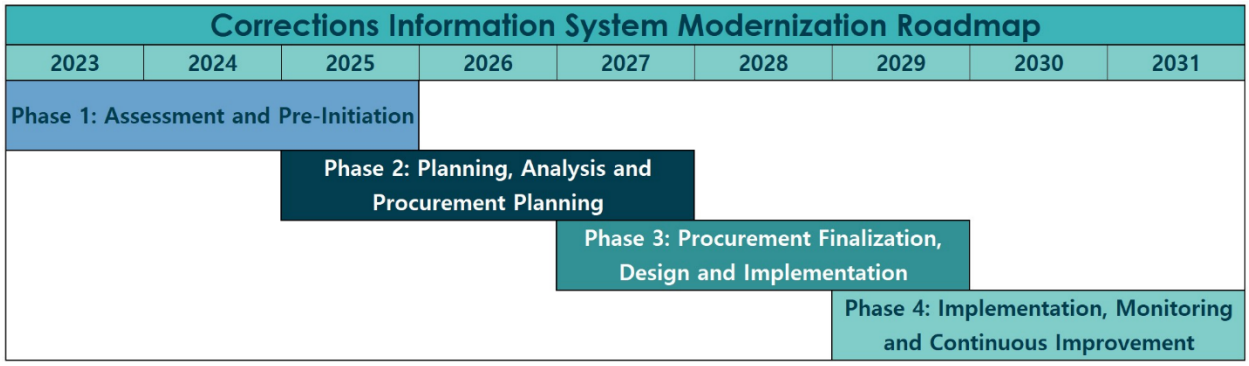
These issues, combined with integration challenges, impede data sharing and collaboration across departments, leading to inefficiencies and inconsistencies in data management and reporting. At a minimum, this increases the difficulty of making data-informed strategic decisions and risks hindering it completely.

As DOC struggles to update its primary system, successfully implementing already-funded IT projects can demonstrate the benefit of investing in modernization

DOC has repeatedly submitted requests to the Legislature for the resources needed to begin modernizing the Corrections Information and Offender Management Systems; all have failed.

In the meantime, DOC interviewed agencies in Oregon and other states to learn more about their modernization efforts for other legacy systems – including the project management team from Indiana's Department of Corrections, who completed a similar modernization effort in 2023. This research was used to develop a high-level roadmap for Corrections Information System Modernization that aligns with the State Enterprise Information Services' Stage Gate process.[14] The project is anticipated to take approximately eight years and cost a total of $57 million using this phased approach. DOC completed Phase 1 internally, which included these interviews and similar market research activities.

Figure 7: Documents DOC's four phases for Correctional Information System modernization



Source: DOC's 2024 Corrections Information System Modernization Business Case

In 2025, DOC submitted a policy option package to fund Phase 2 (Planning, Analysis and Procurement Planning) of the project with an estimated cost of $4 million. This policy option package was not funded by the Legislature. As of July 2025, management had shared they are unable to make those changes with existing resources but planned to continue building their business case in preparation for the 2027-29 biennium. This work was expected to include meeting vendors to demonstrate the capabilities of modern software.

Having such important systems built on outdated technologies makes it inherently challenging to integrate with other tools and platforms. There's already a gap between DOC's current needs and the system's capabilities. As knowledgeable staff are lost and expertise becomes irreplaceable, there will come a point when responding to business needs via system enhancements is no longer feasible. The risk of being

[14] Enterprise Information Services oversees information technology across Oregon state government. The Stage Gate process was a method of oversight for major information technology investments established in 2014. It sets clear "stages" for review at the end of each phase of a project before deciding whether to continue.

unable to maintain existing functionality or recovering from a system failure may increase. This system is a key tool that public safety agencies across the state rely on. If it completely fails, DOC management said it would likely cause every institution to be locked down until alternatives are developed.

However, the 2025 Legislature did fund several IT projects at DOC. These projects provide an opportunity for DOC to demonstrate that it can successfully implement new IT systems as it continues to request funding for its primary system.

Funding was approved to replace DOC's Computerized Maintenance Management System. The agency currently uses 20-year-old software that's no longer supported or updated to track preventative maintenance and work orders across all institutions. The new system will be cloud-based, allowing for centralized management of maintenance operations to improve consistency, analyze maintenance performance, and plan ahead for replacements.

Funding was also approved to replace the Institution Staff Deployment System, through which DOC does most of its scheduling. Development of this system began in-house in 1999 and has been in use since 2001; however, the programming language used hasn't been supported since 2005. DOC IT staff have maintained it in the meantime, but each upgrade has led to application issues. With funding received from the Legislature, DOC plans to purchase a commercial off-the-shelf scheduling and time and attendance system that will be vendor-maintained, mitigating these risks.

DOC expects to have completed replacement of both systems by the end of the 2025-27 biennium.

The Legislature also allocated funding for DOC's Electronic Health Records project, which will replace paper-based health records and is scheduled to go live in 2026. This project marks the first large cloud-based application at DOC. It's also the largest project DOC has done using stage-gate oversight and involves migration and integration of data from their legacy systems.

Because health records are paper based, they create numerous bottlenecks and inefficiencies. In 2025, legislators asked DOC about the percentage of in-custody adults who may qualify for compassionate release and are at end-of-life stages requiring memory care and hospice care. DOC couldn't directly answer these questions – the ability to query diagnosed medical conditions such as dementia on an agency-wide basis will only be possible with the transition from paper files to electronic health records. Digitizing paper records is also poised to dramatically improve data retrieval speeds, increase clinician efficiencies, and reduce manual errors.

It's critical for agencies to be good stewards of the funds they receive. The successes or failures they experience when carrying out previously funded projects are often used to inform future decisions and discussions surrounding upcoming projects and requests for resources. Establishing a track record of successfully implementing IT projects on time, on budget, and that result in intended outcomes, will benefit DOC when competing for limited budget dollars for future projects, including the much-needed modernization of the Corrections Information System and Offender Management System.

DOC's health records room. | Source: DOC

Recommendations

Funding limits and delayed maintenance affect facilities across the state, and available resources are limited. DOC management can focus on strategies to address facility safety risks that interfere with rehabilitation efforts. DOC should:

1. Develop and implement a plan for moving adults in custody out of facilities that pose significant health and safety risks and have reached the end of their useful lifespan.

    a. Report to the Legislature on the risk to human life and safety if people continue to occupy unsafe facilities, such as the Oregon State Penitentiary.

2. For facilities with less urgent infrastructure concerns, develop proactive relocation strategies of the adults in custody from these facilities, in the event conditions deteriorate to uninhabitable, dangerous, or structurally condemned levels.

3. Convert unused or low-use spaces into areas that support rehabilitation, education, and other adult in custody programs.

To effectively implement reforms and outcomes for adults in custody and staff, DOC should:

4. Standardize reforms such as the Oregon Way across DOC's correctional operations through agency policy, procedure, and training standards.

5. Implement a comprehensive employee well-being and retention strategy. This could include wellness programming, peer-support resources, and trauma-informed training.

6. Improve data collection by systematically tracking the Oregon Way outcomes.

To ensure DOC maintains its ability to carry out core operations reliant upon its aging IT systems, DOC should:

7. Mitigate organizational, operational, and security risks caused by the antiquated Corrections Information System and Offender Management System.

8. Develop an exercise to simulate a catastrophic Corrections Information System failure. Emphasize the impacts to daily life, security, and operations of facility staff and incarcerated adults.

    a. Once developed, conduct and analyze the outcomes to assist in quantifying potential consequences of not modernizing the Corrections Information System. Use this analysis, where applicable, to demonstrate consequences of failure to act in future Information System Modernization Business Case documentation, and legislative presentations.

    b. Report to the Legislature on the impact to human life and safety if the system's organizational, operational, and security risks cannot be mitigated or were to occur.

Objective, Scope, and Methodology

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this audit was to determine if DOC facilities, staffing practices, and IT systems align with modern correctional standards to promote adults in custody rehabilitation and staff wellness.

SCOPE

The audit scope encompassed all DOC facilities housing adults in custody, the administration of the Oregon Way at these institutions, and key DOC information systems, including the Corrections Information System and the Offender Management System. The review concentrated on select institutions that exemplified the challenges DOC faces in meeting modern correctional standards and assessed how the Oregon Way principles were applied to security staff, particularly Correctional Officers. Regarding technology, the audit focused on the Corrections Information System, the Offender Management System, and other legacy systems, but did not include a comprehensive review of all DOC IT systems. Auditors conducted fieldwork for this engagement from November 2024 through end of August 2025.

METHODOLOGY

To meet our objective, we performed the following procedures:

- Reviewed and analyzed the agency's policies, procedures, and processes related to adults in custody, staff wellness, and IT systems;
- Reviewed and analyzed relevant Oregon statutes, rules, agency budgets, legislative sessions, informational reports, staffing plans, DOC communications, and DOC materials as relevant to the audit scope;
- Reviewed and analyzed relevant correctional federal law, and best practices, standards, reports, and research related to modern correctional institutions such as American Correctional Association and National Institute of Corrections;
- Reviewed leading practices related to modern correctional standards that promote adults in custody's rehabilitation and staff wellness;
- Reviewed and analyzed staffing levels for security officers at each institution;
- Reviewed and analyzed DOC 2020 and 2023 facility related strategic plans;
- Reviewed and analyzed DOC IT related strategic plans;
- Reviewed Amend contracts with DOC;
- Interviewed DOC leadership and staff across all divisions;
- Interviewed DOC stakeholders and other outside groups, including: DOC labor relation partners, Washington Way Administrator, Portland State University faculty, and Amend leadership;
- Interviewed partnering state agencies and programs, including: Legislative Fiscal Office, Budget and Management section, and the Criminal Justice Commission;
- Interviewed representatives in the Oregon State Legislature; and
- Visited five correctional facilities October 2024 and February 2025: Oregon State Penitentiary, Two Rivers Correctional Institution, Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, and Columbia River Correctional Institution.

INTERNAL CONTROL REVIEW

We determined that the following internal controls were relevant to our audit objective.[15]

- Control Environment
  - We reviewed organizational charts, and agency budget and staffing data to evaluate stability and accountability structures.
  - We reviewed staff recruitment and retention information and data and the Oregon Way information and results.
  - We observed deferred maintenance, staff, and other interactions during facility site visits.
- Information and communication
  - We observed legislative testimony, evaluated documentation, and reviewed communication with legislators.
  - We reviewed agency's two facility strategic plans and three information technology strategic plans. We also reviewed agency's information technology business cases.
  - We reviewed current information systems and deferred maintenance activities.

Deficiencies with these internal controls were documented in the results section of this report.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

We sincerely appreciate the courtesies and cooperation extended by officials and employees of DOC during the course of this audit.

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ABOUT THE SECRETARY OF STATE AUDITS DIVISION

The Oregon Constitution provides that the Secretary of State shall be, by virtue of the office, Auditor of Public Accounts. The Audits Division performs this duty. The division reports to the Secretary of State and is independent of other agencies within the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of Oregon government. The Secretary of State has constitutional authority to audit all state officers, agencies, boards and commissions.

[15] Auditors relied on standards for internal controls from the U.S. Government Accountability Office, report GAO-14-704G.

Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

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July 13, 2026

Steve Bergmann, Director
Secretary of State, Audits Division
255 Capitol St. NE, Suite 180
Salem, OR 97310

Dear Mr. Bergmann,

This letter provides a written response to the Audits Division's final draft audit report titled '*Department of Corrections: Crumbling Facilities, Staffing Shortages, and Obsolete IT Systems Undermine Prison Safety and Reform Efforts.*'

I appreciate the Oregon Secretary of State Audits Division's review and the opportunity to highlight the significant challenges facing the agency, including aging facilities, staffing shortages, and outdated technology. These issues affect our ability to safely operate institutions, deliver effective services, and meet our mission.

The department is committed to addressing these challenges through strategic planning, modernization efforts, and continuous improvement. We appreciate the audit recommendations and look forward to working with the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and our partners to strengthen Oregon's correctional system for the future.

Below is our detailed response to each recommendation in the audit.

RECOMMENDATION 1
Develop and implement a plan for moving adults in custody out of facilities that pose significant health and safety risks and have reached the end of their useful lifespan.

1. Report to the Legislature on the risk to human life and safety if people continue to occupy unsafe facilities, such as the Oregon State Penitentiary.

Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	Target date to complete implementation activities	Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation
Agree	End of the 2027–2029 biennium	Thom Martin 971-707-2102

Narrative for Recommendation 1
Replacing Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP) will provide a modern facility that strengthens our ability to protect communities, support our workforce, and create safer environments for rehabilitation. We have a Policy Option Package (POP) request for the next phase of replacement planning for OSP. The site feasibility study is currently underway this biennium with funding provided from a POP request and appropriation last biennium. The current POP request will be for schematic and architectural design. Future POPs will cover additional phases, including the actual construction phase. We will continue to emphasize the risks involved with not funding a replacement plan for OSP during the quarterly Legislative Days hearings and during the 2027 Legislative Session.

RECOMMENDATION 2 For facilities with less urgent infrastructure concerns, develop proactive relocation strategies of the adults in custody from these facilities, in the event conditions deteriorate to uninhabitable, dangerous, or structurally condemned levels.		
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	**Target date to complete implementation activities**	**Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation**
Agree	End of the 2027–2029 biennium	Thom Martin 971-707-2102

Narrative for Recommendation 2
The department currently receives deferred maintenance funding that addresses its highest priority infrastructure needs; however, available resources are insufficient to address the full backlog of deferred maintenance across the system. To continue reducing this backlog, the Oregon Department of Corrections (DOC) has submitted a Policy Option Package (POP) for the 2027–2029 biennium seeking additional investment in deferred maintenance.

In addition, the department has submitted a POP to replace the Oregon State Penitentiary. Replacing the state's oldest correctional facility would improve safety, address aging infrastructure, and provide greater operational flexibility to manage emergency housing needs should it be required.

The department's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) establishes a framework for responding to emergencies that could affect facility operations, including the potential need to relocate adults in custody if a facility becomes unsafe, uninhabitable, or otherwise unable to operate. The COOP identifies processes for coordinating transportation, identifying available bed space, maintaining continuity of critical operations, and ensuring the safety and security of adults in custody, staff, and the public during an emergency relocation. In response to this recommendation, the department will continue to evaluate and refine its COOP and related emergency procedures to ensure relocation strategies remain current, practical, and capable of

supporting the safe and orderly movement of adults in custody should such an event occur. This ongoing evaluation will incorporate lessons learned, changes in facility capacity, and operational considerations to strengthen the department's preparedness for future emergencies.

RECOMMENDATION 3 Convert unused or low-use spaces into areas that support rehabilitation, education, and other adult in custody programs.		
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	**Target date to complete implementation activities**	**Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation**
Agree	End of the 2027–2029 biennium	Larry Bennett 503-437-2668

Narrative for Recommendation 3
Space within many DOC institutions is limited and a highly utilized resource. Existing classrooms, treatment areas, and program spaces are scheduled throughout the day to support education, behavioral health, treatment, and other rehabilitative services. Institutions regularly assess how available space is allocated and make operational adjustments to maximize its use based on changing programmatic and security needs.

DOC is exploring opportunities to consolidate vulnerable populations of adults in custody, including those with cognitive impairments, significant behavioral health needs, and individuals receiving hospice or end-of-life care, into co-located housing units that are better designed to meet their unique needs. This approach would allow the department to maximize the use of existing facility space, improve the delivery and coordination of specialized services, increase operational efficiencies, and achieve long-term cost savings while maintaining the safety and security of adults in custody and staff.

Converting unused or underutilized space into areas that support rehabilitation, education, and other adult in custody programming will require capital investment. Many existing spaces were not designed for these purposes and would require renovation, infrastructure upgrades, and security modifications to safely and effectively support expanded programming.

However, the age and design of many facilities significantly limits opportunities to repurpose or expand space for additional programming. Increasing access to rehabilitation, education, and other services will require continued investment in modern infrastructure and, where appropriate, additional staffing to safely and effectively support expanded programming.

RECOMMENDATION 4 Standardize reforms such as the Oregon Way across DOC's correctional operations through agency policy, procedure, and training standards.

Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	Target date to complete implementation activities	Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation
Agree	End of the 2027–2029 biennium	Josh Highberger 503-856-6486

Narrative for Recommendation 4
The new strategies, training and expectations strengthen safety, staff wellness, and positive outcomes for adults in custody. DOC is in the process of standardizing our practices across all operations by aligning policy, procedures, and training. This approach promotes meaningful staff-AIC contact and modern correctional practices through a comprehensive curriculum developed with the Professional Development Unit (PDU), integrating de-escalation tactics, trauma-informed approaches, mental-health awareness, and effective communication. These concepts are introduced to all staff during New Employee Orientation (NEO), reinforced for security staff in the Basic Corrections Course (BCC), and strengthened through annual in-service training and instruction provided at the Lieutenant Academy.

Facility Support Team Training further expands structured opportunities for meaningful staff-AIC engagement, and these concepts are now incorporated into promotional processes to ensure leadership alignment. Together, DOC initiatives support a consistent, people-centered correctional system that enhances safety, professionalism, and operational outcomes statewide. There has been no additional legislatively allocated FTE or budget provided to the agency to enhance these efforts. To expand services agency will need to request legislative support.

RECOMMENDATION 5 Implement a comprehensive employee well-being and retention strategy. This could include wellness programming, peer-support resources, and trauma-informed training.		
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	**Target date to complete implementation activities**	**Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation**
Agree	End of the 2027–2029 biennium	Gail Levario 971-600-6131

Narrative for Recommendation 5
The Department agrees that employee wellness is essential to a safe workplace and a strong workforce. Since the auditor's investigation, DOC has completed a comprehensive review of its practices in partnership with SAIF corporation. DOC's programs were analyzed using a correction-specific Health, Safety, and Wellness (HS&W) Maturity Model. This review established a baseline of the department's current wellness efforts and identified opportunities to strengthen

leadership support, improve employee awareness, expand access to wellness resources, and better measure program effectiveness.

Using the review findings, DOC developed and is implementing a 2026-2028 Health, Safety, and Wellness Strategic Plan. The plan builds on existing programs while expanding support for employees across the department. Initiatives in the plan include expanding Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) peer support teams, increasing access to first responder mental health professionals, providing resilience and trauma-informed training, expanding employee wellness education, and implementing a resiliency and nervous system regulation program.

Another important part of the department's wellness strategy is helping injured employees recover and return to work safely. Through DOC's return-to-work programs, employees can stay connected to the workplace while they recover.

Together, these initiatives support the department's broader goals of improving employee well-being, reducing burnout, and retaining a healthy and engaged workforce. DOC will continue to measure participation in wellness programs, employee retention, workplace injuries, return-to-work outcomes, and other key performance indicators to evaluate progress and make improvements over time.

RECOMMENDATION 6 Improve data collection by systematically tracking the Oregon Way outcomes.		
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	**Target date to complete implementation activities**	**Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation**
Agree	End of the 2027–2029 biennium	Josh Highberger 503-856-6486

Narrative for Recommendation 6
The AMEND program partnered with DOC to evaluate its correctional culture transformation initiative based on Norwegian correctional practices. Using staff surveys, interviews, site visits, and operational data, the evaluation found improved staff wellness and morale, stronger staff–AIC relationships, reduced use of restrictive housing and force, and better behavioral outcomes. The research concluded that emphasizing respect, communication, and de-escalation tactics strengthens institutional safety while improving outcomes for both staff and AICs.

DOC continues to strengthen its data-driven approach by developing a standardized, comprehensive, and sharable system for tracking outcomes across all institutions through the Offender Management System (OMS). This system uses consistent measures based on AIC risk level and behavior, enabling the agency to monitor progression in areas such as engagement, stability, rehabilitation, and overall institutional behavior.

RECOMMENDATION 7 Mitigate organizational, operational, and security risks caused by the antiquated Corrections Information System and Offender Management System.		
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	**Target date to complete implementation activities**	**Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation**
Agree	End of the 2027-2029 biennium	Thom Martin 971-707-2102

Narrative for Recommendation 7

DOC's almost 40-year-old IT system is currently stable, however the ability to make needed updates to the system is becoming extremely difficult. The current systems are unable to accommodate modernization, risk management, or service delivery updates.

DOC has a POP request for the 2027-2029 biennium to address the replacement of our legacy and unsupported systems that are integrated with our DOC400 to provide the modern security, data, and technology needed to lessen potential for risk and improve our data coordination with public safety partners in the community.

RECOMMENDATION 8 Develop an exercise to simulate a catastrophic Corrections Information System failure. Emphasize the impacts to daily life, security, and operations of facility staff and incarcerated adults. Once developed, conduct and analyze the outcomes to assist in quantifying potential consequences of not modernizing the Corrections Information System. Use this analysis, where applicable, to demonstrate consequences of failure to act in future Information System Modernization Business Case documentation, and legislative presentations. Report to the Legislature on the impact to human life and safety if the system's organizational, operational, and security risks cannot be mitigated or were to occur.		
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	**Target date to complete implementation activities**	**Name and phone number of specific point of contact for implementation**
Agree	June 30, 2029	Thom Martin 971-707-2102

Narrative for Recommendation 8
DOC has submitted POP requests for the 2027–2029 biennium to replace the aging CIS and other end-of-life systems and IT infrastructure. DOC is also participating in the 2026 Cyber Tabletop Exercise (TTX) to assess our resilience during a major cyber disruption. Lessons from the TTX will guide the development of a department-wide tabletop exercise that more accurately models a catastrophic CIS failure.

Because this enterprise-level exercise requires coordination across Enterprise Information Services, cyber security services, data center services, all DOC divisions, and key public safety partners, DOC will develop a detailed plan within the next year and then will conduct the full functional tabletop exercise within the 2027–2029 biennium. This effort will quantify operational, security, and daily-life impacts on staff and AICs. Ultimately it will strengthen operational resiliency and provide the data needed for future POP requests.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the audit recommendations. We look forward to working with the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and our public safety partners to strengthen Oregon's correctional system for the future.

Please contact my Chief of Staff, Jennifer Black, at (503) 569-3318 with questions.

Sincerely,

Mike Reese
Director

Oregon
Secretary of State

Secretary of State **Tobias Read**
Audits Director **Steve Bergmann**

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