House Democrats announce hearing on recent OYA review

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM, Ore. â€” Oregon House Democrats said Thursday they will ask the Oregon Youth Authority to report on the findings of an external review to a legislative committee when the report is released next month. The House Judiciary Committee will receive a progress report on the implementation of recommendations following a case last year when a senior manager resigned and is being investigated a year after the incident.

The report was spurred when the manager and several employees resigned or were dismissed for misuse of state funds and using work crews of offenders in the juvenile facility in La Grande to perform private work without compensation.

â€œIt is our job as legislators to ensure OYA facilities are well-managed, make wise use of taxpayer dollars and are safe for the staff and the youth who are in their care and custody,â€• said State Rep. Chip Shields. â€œWhat we need to know now is what the external reviews uncovered and what steps have been taken to ensure this never happens again.â€•

Rep. Shields, chair of the Public Safety Strategies Task Force and a member of the House Ways and Means and Judiciary Committees, said he is working to arrange a hearing in mid-June for the House and Senate Judiciary Committees.

â€œWe will be asking the OYA director and his staff to let us know exactly what was in the two reports that were spurred by the Riverbend case, and to provide us with any recommendations made in those reports,â€• said Shields.

House Majority Leader Dave Hunt added that Oregon House Democrats have made government accountability a major priority that will continue through the 2009 session. That, he said, includes preventing exactly the kind of problems that occurred at Riverbend.

Hunt (D-Clackamas County) said the Legislature in 2007 created the Professional Standards Office to receive and investigate complaints from within the OYA. That office received the original complaint about Riverbend and conducted an investigation that is ongoing today.

â€œThrough this new office, we were able to uncover a violation of the public trust and a situation where youth incarcerated in the facility were put at risk,â€• said Hunt. â€œWe will continue to require that these

agencies be held to an extremely high standard. While the vast majority of workers at OYA are dedicated, hard-working individuals who do a great job, we must continue to be vigilant in overseeing agency activities.â€•

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