



Pronounced racial and ethnic disparities in Multnomah County’s criminal justice system revealed in new report

Local nonprofits call on County and City of Portland to act

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PORTLAND, Ore. – A new report shows people of color are negatively impacted in greater numbers relative to whites at every stage of the journey through the criminal justice system in Multnomah County. The disparity is particularly great for African Americans.

The Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Report was produced by an independent researcher at the request of Multnomah County using data collected by those working within the criminal justice system in the county. It was funded by a grant through the MacArthur Foundation’s Safety and Justice Challenge. 19 other jurisdictions around the country also received funding to do their own studies.

The report found that black people are 320% more likely than whites to have their crimes accepted for prosecution, 500% more likely to spend time in jail, and 600% more likely to be sentenced to prison.

“People are being punished in Multnomah County for being black,” said Jann Carson, Associate Director of the ACLU of Oregon. “While we aren’t surprised to see this evidence of racism in our criminal justice system, we are disappointed.”

The ACLU of Oregon, Metropolitan Public Defender, Oregon Justice Resource Center and Partnership for Safety and Justice are the organizations calling for action.

“We want to see measurable goals in place to address discrimination by the system,” said Lane Borg, Executive Director of Metropolitan Public Defender Services, “and we

want senior leadership in Multnomah County and the City of Portland taking personal responsibility for fixing the problem.”

Lane Borg added:

“Multnomah County is to be commended for participating in the Safety and Justice Challenge. But now all of us working within the criminal justice system need to take ownership.”

Bobbin Singh, Executive Director of Oregon Justice Resource Center, believes this report should be just the start of monitoring the extent of the problem in Oregon:

“This is a snapshot of one point in time in our criminal justice system. We want to see a report of this kind produced every year in Multnomah County so we can track progress.”

He added, “Other counties in Oregon should follow suit. More light must be shed on how discretion is used in our criminal justice system, particularly in parts of the system where decisions are made behind closed doors.”

“This report confirms the kind of racial disparities we found in a 2011 report on youth tried as adults in Oregon. Multnomah County residents must have faith in their justice system for it to function effectively and achieve its goal of maintaining public safety,” said Andy Ko, Executive Director of Partnership for Safety and Justice.

“Communities of color deserve a system that is fair, just and unbiased. The problem is systemic and has long-lasting consequences for individuals and our communities.”

The organizations pledged to continue to act as watchdogs to ensure change happens.

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