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RESEARCH BRIEF NO. 6 · OREGON

Smart on crime, smart on the budget: Oregon

Close the Oregon State Penitentiary. Don't build another one.

$1 billion

estimated construction plus 25 years of interest on a new penitentiary

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AT A GLANCE

Close OSP. Don't build another one.

$1 billion

estimated construction plus 25 years of interest on a new penitentiary (BarNone calculation from DOC's 2024 estimate of $624 million)

No additional prison needed

for men or women in the next ten years, the state's Criminal Justice Commission found in February 2026

12 of 166

people who applied for early medical release from 2013 to 2021 were granted it; 11 died waiting

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THE BOTTOM LINE

The bottom line

Oregon should close the Oregon State Penitentiary and should not build another full-size prison to replace it. Everybody who has looked at OSP agrees people shouldn't be living or working there. The state's own auditors call it functionally obsolete. Where we part ways with the Department of Corrections is the next step. DOC's answer is a new prison it estimated in 2024 would cost $624 million, more than $1 billion once the borrowing is paid back. Ours is a smaller prison system.

Here's how it works. Oregon has room in its other prisons, but much of it is mothballed: units that are built and paid for but sit dark because DOC hasn't had the staff or budget to run them. When OSP closes, its staff and budget move into those units, so the reopened beds are staffed and no one loses a position. Add a small medical unit in Salem, and keep the number of men in prison a little below today's level instead of letting it grow as forecast. Then Oregon has a bed for everyone who needs to stay, without building another prison. Oregon's prison population has already fallen by about one in six since 2016.

And Oregon keeps the money. Not building a new OSP means about $1 billion, the $624 million price plus 25 years of interest, never goes into a prison. That money can go into the things that actually prevent the next crime: community supervision funded at what it really costs, addiction and mental health treatment, housing, reentry, and jobs and income that pull people and neighborhoods out of poverty. Reducing poverty reduces crime.

So this brief makes three asks of the 2027 Legislature and Governor Kotek:

1. **Reject a full-size replacement.** Don't fund the design package for a new OSP in the 2027-29 budget.
2. **Direct DOC to build a funded closure and transition plan.** It should show usable beds by security level, a small medical and geriatric unit inside an existing fence in Salem, a plan for maximum-security and behavioral health housing, and a real workforce transition negotiated with the union.
3. **Bring the population down on purpose.** Make early medical release actually work, give older people who've served long sentences a hearing, and fund community supervision at what it really costs so violations don't refill the beds.

Uncertainty should decide the order and the speed of the transition. It should not become the reason Oregon builds another prison.

KEY NUMBERS

Key numbers

Every figure here comes from a state or federal source. BarNone calculations are labeled.

MEASURE	FIGURE	SOURCE
People in Oregon prisons, May 19, 2026	12,124 (11,200 men, 924 women)	DOC Quick Facts
Change in prison population since 2016	down about 17.6%	OEA forecast, Apr. 2026
Physical bed capacity, 12 prisons, incl. mothballed beds (April 2026)	15,310	Audit 2026-19, Fig. 1
Budgeted, staffed beds (June 2024)	14,174	Audit 2026-19, Fig. 6
OSP capacity / people at OSP, April 2026	2,194 / 1,751	Audit 2026-19
Cost per person per day, prison vs. supervision (2025-27)	$218.36 vs. $15.09	DOC Quick Facts
DOC General Fund, 2025-27 legislatively approved	$2.69 billion	DOC Quick Facts
DOC's estimate to replace OSP (2024)	$624 million, 5 to 10 years to build	KGW
Same, repaid over 25 years at 4.5% (BarNone calc.)	about $1.05 billion	
Deferred maintenance, all prisons, excluding seismic	about $861 million	Audit 2026-19
People age 61 and older	1,309	DOC Quick Facts
Early medical releases granted, 2013-2021	12 of 166 applicants; 11 died waiting	Testimony, Senate Judiciary, Feb. 6, 2024
Men forecast in prison, March 2036	about 11,850	OEA forecast, Apr. 2026
Additional prison needed in the next 10 years?	No, for men or women	CJC HB 3078 report, Feb. 2026

PART 1

Where Oregon is now: fewer people, more money, beds that aren't all ready

The population is flat. Oregon's prison population has fallen about 17.6 percent since 2016, from roughly 14,700 to about 12,100, according to the state's forecasters. It dropped during the pandemic and has stayed near 12,000 since. DOC counted 12,124 people on May 19, 2026. The state's official forecaster, the Office of Economic Analysis, expects slow growth, to about 12,864 by 2036 in its April 2026 forecast. In February 2026 the Criminal Justice Commission, using the October 2025 forecast, concluded that "neither an additional female correctional facility nor an additional male correctional facility" will need to be built in the next ten years.

The cost keeps climbing anyway. It now costs $218.36 a day to hold one person in prison, about $79,700 a year. Supervising someone in the community costs $15.09 a day, about $5,500 a year. DOC's legislatively approved General Fund budget for 2025-27 is $2.69 billion. A lot of that growth isn't anyone's fault: health care the state is constitutionally required to provide, an older population, and wages high enough to fill officer jobs. But the direction matters. Oregon is paying a lot more to hold fewer people, and that's the backdrop for a request to build a new prison.

There's room, but much of it is mothballed. The Secretary of State's July 2026 audit lists 15,310 beds of physical capacity across the 12 prisons, against 12,150 people in April 2026. The audit notes that this capacity "includes inactive or unbudgeted beds that could be used if resources for staff, furniture, and equipment were available." Counting only beds DOC budgets and runs, the June 2024 figure was 14,174. The biggest block of dark space is at Deer Ridge in Madras, which had 950 inactive beds in 2023.

Staffing is the real limit. In June 2024, 254 of about 2,468 security jobs were vacant, and DOC said it needed 261 more security staff just to end mandatory overtime. Two Rivers, Eastern Oregon and Coffee Creek had nearly two-thirds of the vacancies. That's why DOC told legislators in November 2025 that closing Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution on a one-year budget timeline would require releasing about 1,300 people. With no money to open and staff other beds, there was nowhere to put them by the deadline. Moving people takes up-front operating money and time. It doesn't take a new prison.

PART 2

Why a new OSP is the wrong answer

DOC's case for replacing OSP is real, and we take it seriously. The original buildings date to 1866, and most of the housing is from the 1950s. The auditors found summer temperatures over 90 degrees, one old elevator that doesn't reach every floor, cell doors in some units too narrow for wheelchairs and walkers, a cramped infirmary and fire suppression that doesn't work in places. DOC estimates OSP needs more than $200 million for disability access, functionality

and maintenance. An emergency boiler replacement cost about twice what a planned one would have, plus $100,000 a month for a temporary boiler. Nobody should defend keeping people there.

A new building would also be easier to run. Modern layouts need fewer officer posts, and DOC can fairly argue that a new prison would cost less per bed to staff than OSP does. We concede that. Our objection is to the size of what DOC wants to build and to what it commits Oregon to for the next fifty years.

Why we oppose it anyway:

1. **It replaces beds the state's own analysts say Oregon doesn't need to add.** DOC isn't proposing an expansion. It's proposing to rebuild OSP at roughly the same size. But the Criminal Justice Commission found no need for an additional men's or women's prison in the next ten years, and the population is about one in six smaller than in 2016. That finding doesn't settle how to replace OSP's functions. It does mean this debate is about retiring obsolete capacity, not expanding the system. Rebuilding at full size locks today's count in concrete instead of building for the system Oregon could have.
2. **It costs a lot more than $624 million.** That estimate is from 2024, before design work started, and it doesn't include the separate central health care facility DOC is also planning. Prisons are built with bonds, and bonds carry interest. Part 6 shows the comparison.
3. **Staffing is the bigger cost, and it lasts longer than the building.** Over a building's life, the people who run it cost far more than the construction. Rebuilding 2,250 beds commits Oregon to staffing about 2,250 beds for decades, at a time when DOC can't fill the jobs it already has.
4. **The real unmet need is medical, not cell space.** DOC has 94 infirmary beds in six infirmaries. Its own health care consultant, Falcon Correction and Community Services, raised replacing OSP with a facility better suited to a medically complex prison population, as The Lund Report summarized it. That points to a small medical and geriatric unit, not a 2,250-bed prison.
5. **The other eleven prisons are falling apart too.** Ten of twelve are rated in poor condition, and the maintenance backlog is about $861 million. The Legislature gave DOC $50 million for that work in 2025-27. A new OSP does nothing for the other eleven. Running fewer buildings gives the maintenance money a fighting chance.

What about earthquakes? Governor Kotek's September 2025 seismic executive order (EO 25-22) could become an argument for building new prisons. The auditors listed OSP, Eastern Oregon, Oregon State Correctional Institution and Santiam as likely candidates for replacement under it. But seismic risk is a reason to get people out of an old building. It is not a reason to rebuild that building at the same size somewhere else.

PART 3

The capacity math: the beds are there when OSP's staff move with them

Oregon can close OSP without building another prison by doing two things. Move OSP's staff and budget into prison units that are already built but sitting dark, and keep the number of men in prison a little below where it is today instead of letting it grow as forecast.

Where the room comes from. All counts are from the Secretary of State's July 2026 audit.

- The men's prisons other than OSP and Coffee Creek (which holds women and intake) have 11,431 beds of physical capacity.
- About 10,250 of those were budgeted and staffed as of June 2024. That's the audit's 14,174 budgeted beds, minus Coffee Creek's 1,795 and OSP's 2,130.
- Comparing the audit's two capacity tables suggests the other roughly 1,180 are inactive or unbudgeted: mothballed space DOC hasn't had the staff or operating budget to run. The tables are from different dates, so DOC should confirm that inventory facility by facility and unit by unit before the transition plan counts on it. Deer Ridge alone had 950 of these in 2023.
- Add a 225-bed medical and geriatric unit in Salem (Part 5), and the men's side has about 11,656 beds.

The staff follow the beds. OSP has 386 budgeted security positions, a large workforce that moves with the closure. For scale, OSP runs 386 security positions for about 1,750 people; at that ratio, 1,180 beds would take about 260, and minimum-security units like Deer Ridge's take fewer. The exact number depends on each receiving unit's post plan, specialty-care staffing and who chooses to transfer, and DOC should lay that out before units reopen. Closing OSP is how Oregon pays to open those units, without layoffs (Part 7).

How many men the system can hold. A prison system can't run at 100 percent. It needs some empty beds to keep apart people who can't be housed together, take units offline for repairs and absorb a bad month. We use 5 percent, about 580 beds, as a planning reserve. The state's April 2026 forecast expects about 11,850 men in prison by March 2036.

MEN HELD BELOW THE 2036 FORECAST	MEN IN PRISON, 2036	BEDS LEFT OVER (OF 11,656)	5% RESERVE MET?
None	11,848	−192	No
200	11,648	8	No
400	11,448	208	No
600	11,248	408	No

MEN HELD BELOW THE 2036 FORECAST	MEN IN PRISON, 2036	BEDS LEFT OVER (OF 11,656)	5% RESERVE MET?
800	11,048	608	Yes

In plain terms: if Oregon keeps about 11,050 men in prison, a little below today's 11,200, instead of letting the count climb to 11,850, everyone who needs to stay has a bed, with room to spare. Oregon's prison population has already fallen by about one in six since 2016, and the state's own Criminal Justice Commission says Oregon won't need an additional prison in the next ten years. Holding the line on the men's population is a policy choice, and Part 4 lays out how: medical and elder release, fewer people sent back for probation and supervision violations, Justice Reinvestment programs and earned time.

What could move these numbers:

- The ten-year forecast has a margin of error of about 11 percent in either direction.
- Coffee Creek also runs intake for men, so a few hundred men are counted on the women's side. That makes men's capacity look slightly smaller than it is.
- The budgeted bed counts are from June 2024, the latest the audit reports by facility.
- Beds aren't interchangeable. Much of the mothballed space is minimum security, so people move in a chain (Part 5).

That's why closure is tied to readiness conditions, including a men's population below a set number, and not just a date on the calendar.

PART 4

Who could safely go home, and what it takes

Older people are the lowest-risk people in prison. This is one of the most consistent findings in criminology. The U.S. Sentencing Commission followed federal prisoners released in 2005. Among those with the lightest criminal records, 53 percent of people under 30 were rearrested, compared with 11.3 percent of people 60 and older. Oregon has 1,309 people age 61 and older. The auditors noted national estimates that older people cost two to three times more to care for than younger people. Age alone shouldn't release anyone. But a 70-year-old in a wheelchair is, as a group, one of the safest bets in the system, and Oregon has almost no working way to review those cases.

Oregon can't yet count who's dying or has dementia. When legislators asked in 2025 how many people might qualify for compassionate release or need memory or hospice care, DOC couldn't answer, because its health records were on paper. Its electronic health record was due to go live in 2026. Oregon shouldn't make a half-billion-dollar building decision without that count. Getting it is our first recommendation.

What Oregon can do under current law, starting in 2027:

LEVER	WHO ACTS	WHAT IT WOULD TAKE
Early medical release (ORS 144.126)	Board of Parole	DOC screens and refers people with terminal illness or permanent incapacity on its own, instead of waiting for applications. The Board adopted new rules in January 2025. Only 12 of 166 applicants were released from 2013 to 2021, and 11 died waiting.
Placements for people approved for release	Legislature (budget), Oregon Health Authority, DOC	The Board won't release anyone without a safe place to go. Fund nursing home, adult foster care and supportive housing beds, and enroll people in Medicaid before release.
Clemency for the old and very sick	Governor	Published criteria, medical review, notice to victims and DAs, and an annual report. A narrow, open process, not mass commutations.
Fewer people sent back for violations	Legislature (budget)	Fund county supervision at actual cost (Part 6). Underfunded probation turns into revocations, and revocations turn into prison beds.
Justice Reinvestment grants	Legislature (budget), CJC	Keep funding county programs that keep prison-bound people safely in the community.

What needs a statute change:

- **A clinician-led medical release committee, with required DOC referrals and annual public data.** Bills to create one were introduced in 2021 (SB 835), 2023 (SB 520) and 2024 (SB 1560).
- **A geriatric "second look" hearing** for people 60 and older who've served at least 15 years, with full victim participation, a finding of low risk and a verified place to live. Where it reduces sentences voters approved, such as Measure 11's, Article IV, Section 33 of the Oregon Constitution requires a two-thirds vote.
- **Earned time changes.** Earned time is capped at 20 percent for most sentences and 30 percent for some, under ORS 421.121, and the 1989 sentencing guidelines largely replaced parole.

How many people is that? Part 3 shows the target: about 800 fewer men by 2036 than the forecast expects. That's a statewide total over a decade, not a release list. Medical and elder release will account for some of it. Most older people in prison won't qualify, because some are serving life without parole, some are still inside a mandatory minimum, and many have no place to go. The bigger and steadier lever is keeping people from coming back on violations, which is why funding community supervision at cost matters so much. DOC and the Criminal Justice Commission should report the expected effect of each lever before closure dates are locked in. A bill passed in 2027 would likely take effect in 2028.

PART 5

The route out of OSP

People leave OSP in a chain, not in one big move. Most of OSP's population is medium and close custody, plus Oregon's maximum security, intensive management and behavioral health units. Most of the empty beds are minimum security. So the moves go like this:

1. **Open Deer Ridge's empty minimum units** and fill them with minimum-eligible men now sitting in medium beds. DOC itself said closing South Fork Forest Camp would mean opening those units sooner.
2. **That frees medium beds** at Two Rivers, Snake River, Eastern Oregon and Oregon State Correctional Institution for OSP's medium and close custody population.
3. **Build a medical and geriatric unit of about 200 to 250 beds inside an existing Salem-area fence.** It takes OSP's infirmary patients, frail older people and anyone who needs skilled nursing. Keeping it in Salem keeps patients near Willamette Valley hospitals and cuts the cost of guarding people at outside appointments. In 2019 DOC estimated that converting the OSP Minimum annex into a 172-bed geriatric unit would cost $32.2 million up front, and legislative budget analysts noted that building inside another institution's fence would likely be more cost-effective. This unit needs its own estimate.
4. **Convert existing space for maximum security, intensive management and behavioral health.** Snake River and Two Rivers already run medium-to-maximum housing. OSP's Behavioral Health Unit, which DOC rebuilt with Disability Rights Oregon from 2016 to 2020, needs a real equivalent, not just beds. **This is the hardest piece and the least studied.** We don't have a credible cost for it, and DOC needs to produce one.
5. **Keep OSP safe until it closes.** That means life-safety repairs, like fire suppression, heat and the boiler, not the full $200 million-plus upgrade.

Closure should be tied to readiness, not just a date. We'd set June 30, 2033 as the target, the same window DOC proposes for building a replacement, and the Legislature should confirm closure can happen when all of these are true:

- DOC has published OSP's population by age, custody level, sentence and medical need.
- Enough staffed, budgeted receiving beds exist at each custody level for everyone still at OSP, plus a reserve.
- The medical and geriatric unit is open and staffed.
- Maximum security, intensive management and behavioral health housing is open somewhere else and meets the standards Disability Rights Oregon and DOC agreed to.
- The statewide men's population has stayed below a set number for six months.
- A workforce transition agreement is in place with the union (Part 7).

If a condition slips, the move slows down. It doesn't turn into a new prison.

Real costs of this route, said plainly:

- **Distance from family.** Moving people to Umatilla, Ontario or Madras puts them farther from families, lawyers and Willamette Valley hospitals. The auditors flagged remote minimum-security prisons as barriers to health care, family ties, education and jobs. To limit the harm, keep the medical unit in Salem, expand video visiting, and give Valley beds to people close to release.
- **Receiving prisons are already short-staffed.** Moving people into understaffed prisons invites lockdowns. Staffing has to move with the work, which is why the workforce plan is a readiness condition and not an afterthought.

PART 6

The money

The biggest savings is the prison Oregon doesn't build. DOC estimated in 2024 that replacing OSP would cost $624 million. Paid back over 25 years at 4.5 percent interest, that's about $1.05 billion, or roughly $42 million a year out of the General Fund. If construction costs rise to $800 million by the time a shovel goes in, it's about $1.35 billion. Not building it means that money stays available for things that actually keep people safe. Under the illustrative construction assumptions in the table below, and after paying for the smaller projects closure needs, Oregon would avoid about $61 million to $93 million in debt payments every two years, for 25 years, starting when the bonds would have been sold. That range should be updated once DOC prices the medical and specialty-custody projects. On top of that, Oregon skips the more than $200 million DOC says OSP itself needs.

How that money reaches communities. Prisons are built with borrowed money, state bonds, and the state pays those bonds back out of the same General Fund that pays for probation officers, treatment and reentry. Every bond payment Oregon doesn't owe on a new prison is General Fund money it can spend on supervision, treatment and housing instead, every budget cycle, for 25 years.

Debt payments: a new prison vs. the closure route. These are BarNone estimates. They assume 25-year bonds at 4.5 percent with level payments and don't count issuance costs. Treasury would run the real numbers.

SCENARIO	REPLACEMENT COST	CLOSURE-ROUTE CONSTRUCTION	NET DEBT PAYMENTS AVOIDED, PER BIENNIUM
Lower avoided debt	$624M	$170M	about $61M
Central illustration	$624M	$140M	about $65M
Higher avoided debt (replacement rises to $800M by construction)	$800M	$110M	about $93M

For scale: $624 million borrowed this way means paying back about $1.05 billion over 25 years. At $800 million it's about $1.35 billion. DOC's entire General Fund debt service for 2025-27 is $82.6 million.

The closure-route construction figure covers the Salem medical unit (DOC's 2019 estimate for a smaller geriatric conversion was $32.2 million; this unit needs its own estimate), opening Deer Ridge's dark units, life-safety repairs to keep OSP running until it closes, and a placeholder for maximum security and behavioral health housing. That last piece is the least certain number in this brief.

Other costs Oregon avoids by closing OSP (these overlap in part, so they shouldn't be added together):

- More than $200 million DOC estimates OSP needs for disability access, functionality and maintenance.
- OSP's seismic retrofit, estimated at $22.6 million.
- OSP's share of the roughly $861 million maintenance backlog.

Operating savings: where they come from. Moving a person from OSP to another prison doesn't save $79,700 a year. That's an average, and most of it moves with the person, along with the staff. The savings come from running one fewer old building, with its utilities, emergency repairs and outside guarding of patients; from overtime that drops when transferred staff fill vacancies elsewhere; and from units that close as the men's population comes down. DOC hasn't published OSP's operating budget in a form that lets anyone price this precisely, so the Legislature should require it as part of the closure plan (Recommendation 2).

What the savings should pay for, in order:

1. **Community supervision at actual cost.** State law requires a cost study every six years. The Legislative Fiscal Office's 2025-27 budget review describes the Governor's budget as including $20 million General Fund "to fund 29% of the Community Corrections cost study," and says meeting the projected supervision caseload, including the probation growth from HB 4002, would take an increase of $68.2 million General Fund to the grant-in-aid that goes to counties. Funding fell in 18 of Oregon's 36 counties. Unfunded probation sends people back to prison on violations, which undercuts everything in Part 3.
2. **Placements for people approved for medical or elder release:** nursing home, adult foster care and supportive housing beds.
3. **Justice Reinvestment grants** for county programs that keep prison-bound people safely in the community.
4. **Treatment inside prison that follows people when they move.** 48 percent of people in Oregon prisons have substance dependence. In November 2025 DOC offered to cut treatment programs to save money. That's a false economy.

Fight poverty, because it prevents crime. The strongest crime prevention Oregon can buy isn't a cell. It's a paycheck. The research is consistent:

- **Jobs for young people cut violence.** In a randomized trial of 1,634 high school students from high-violence Chicago neighborhoods, an eight-week summer jobs program cut violent-crime arrests by 43 percent over the next 16 months (Heller, *Science*, 2014).
- **Better wages keep people from coming back.** A study of nearly six million prison releases from 2000 to 2014 found that minimum wage increases lowered the chance people returned to prison within a year, and state Earned Income Tax Credits lowered it for women. The drop showed up in property and drug crimes, the kind people commit for money (Agan and Makowsky, NBER).

So the money from the prison Oregon doesn't build should go beyond the justice system: summer and transitional jobs, wage and income supports for people leaving prison and their families, and the housing and treatment that make it possible to keep a job. Keeping people safely out of prison shrinks the need for the most expensive beds, and it keeps families together. The budget savings show up when Oregon can stop staffing units, close buildings and skip building new ones.

New York is the warning here. It closed 24 prisons, but according to the Vera Institute, the state's correctional spending per incarcerated person still rose more than 79 percent from 2011 to 2021, from $63,926 to $114,831, while the prison population fell 45 percent. Savings that aren't locked into law tend to get absorbed. That's why Recommendation 8 puts them in statute.

The timing matters. Oregon has to fund the transition before it sees the full savings: county supervision, release placements, the medical unit and reopening dark units all come first. Those up-front appropriations are what make closure possible. The savings come later, as debt is never issued, OSP's building costs end and units close.

PART 7

The people who work at OSP

This plan doesn't rely on layoffs. Its goal is continued state employment for every OSP employee through negotiated transfers, vacancy management, retraining and funded transition help. The mothballed units that make closure possible (Part 3) need staff, and OSP's staff are the people who fill them. The state keeps the jobs. It stops paying to prop up a building the auditors call unsafe.

Here's why it's workable. DOC is hundreds of officers short. In June 2024 it had 254 security vacancies and said it needed 261 more security staff to end mandatory overtime, which the auditors found is burning people out. A lot of OSP's work will still be in Salem: Oregon State

Correctional Institution, Santiam, Coffee Creek in Wilsonville and the new medical unit. Other jobs will move to prisons that are desperate for staff.

The hard part is that a Salem officer with kids in Salem schools isn't going to move to Umatilla. So the transition plan has to be built position by position, with the union, and should include:

- A transfer offer for every OSP employee, with seniority protected.
- First claim on open jobs at Salem-area prisons and the medical unit, with a hiring hold on those jobs until OSP staff have had their pick.
- Relocation and retention pay for anyone who chooses to move to a receiving prison.
- Retraining for the medical unit's nursing and care jobs.
- A public count, before closure, of how many OSP jobs exist in each classification and where each one lands.

We'd rather say this plainly than offer a guarantee that falls apart in bargaining. Officers have spent years in a building the state's own auditors call unsafe. They deserve a straight answer.

PART 8

Recommendations for the 2027 Legislature and Governor Kotek

Some of these need a new law. Most don't. We've marked which is which.

#	RECOMMENDATION	HOW IT HAPPENS	REQUIRES A STATUTE CHANGE?
1	**Count who's inside OSP before anything gets designed.** By December 2027, DOC reports OSP's population by age, custody level, sentence type and medical need, and statewide counts of people with dementia, terminal illness or daily-living limits.	Budget note in the 2027-29 DOC budget	No
2	**Don't fund a full-size replacement.** Decline the design package for a new OSP. Redirect the planning money into a closure and transition plan due by September 2028.	2027-29 DOC budget (Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee)	No
3	**Set a closure target with readiness conditions.** OSP stops housing people by June 30, 2033, once the conditions in Part 5 are met. Until then, life-safety repairs only.	Statute or budget note	Yes, for a statutory target
4	**Build a 200 to 250-bed medical and geriatric unit inside an existing Salem-area fence,** after an updated cost study.	Capital construction bill and bond authorization	No new policy law
5	**Plan and cost the maximum-security, intensive management and behavioral health housing,** with Disability Rights Oregon at the table.	Budget note; later, capital and operating requests	No

#	RECOMMENDATION	HOW IT HAPPENS	REQUIRES A STATUTE CHANGE?
6	**Use the medical release law Oregon already has.** DOC screens and refers people with terminal illness or permanent incapacity, and the state funds placements for those approved.	DOC policy, Board of Parole rules, budget	No
7	**Fix medical release for good.** A clinician-led review committee, required DOC referrals and annual public data.	Statute, building on SB 835, SB 520 and SB 1560	Yes
8	**Lock the savings into community safety.** For the first three budget cycles after OSP closes, at least half of net savings, meaning operating reductions plus avoided debt service as certified by the Legislative Fiscal Office, goes to county supervision, Justice Reinvestment grants and release placements.	Statute creating a reinvestment account	Yes
9	**Fund the HB 4002 probation caseload at cost,** starting with the $68.2 million gap the Legislative Fiscal Office identified.	2027-29 DOC budget	No
10	**Create a geriatric second-look hearing** for people 60 and older who've served at least 15 years, with full victim participation. Aggravated murder and life without parole excluded at first.	Statute (likely a two-thirds vote where Measure 11 sentences are affected)	Yes
11	**Publish clemency criteria for the old and very sick,** with medical review, victim notice and an annual report.	Executive order	No
12	**Negotiate the workforce transition** described in Part 7.	Collective bargaining, budget note	No
13	**Plan the Salem site now.** About 200 acres near downtown, which DOC's own director has said could go to housing and mixed use.	Statute directing DAS and the City of Salem	Yes

Recommendations 1, 2, 6, 9 and 11 can all happen in 2027 without a single new policy bill.

PART 9

The pushback, and our answers

"This lets dangerous people out." Most of this plan moves people. It doesn't release them. The releases it does propose go through the Board of Parole or the Governor, one case at a time, with victims heard. They focus on the oldest and sickest people, the group least likely to commit another crime. Of people released in early 2022, just 12 percent returned to prison for a new felony within three years. This plan also pays for the probation officers and treatment that prevent the next crime. A new building doesn't do that.

"Victims deserve finality." They do. Everything here keeps victim notice and participation. The second-look hearing excludes aggravated murder and life without parole at first. Victims also deserve money spent on services and supervision, not 25 years of bond payments.

"District attorneys will fight it." Most of it changes no sentence. Closing OSP is a decision about buildings, and medical release is already state law. DAs need funded probation too, because unfunded probation sends their cases back as violations. We'd welcome them in writing the second-look criteria.

"A new building would be cheaper to run." Per bed, probably. That's DOC's best argument and we don't dismiss it. But the cheapest bed is the one you don't have to staff at all. A full-size replacement locks Oregon into staffing about 2,250 beds for decades. The closure route builds only what's actually needed.

"You're building a prison too." We're proposing a medical and geriatric unit of 200 to 250 beds inside an existing fence, because some people need nursing care and Oregon doesn't have enough. That's a long way from a 2,250-bed prison, and we'd rather say so up front than have it treated as a gotcha.

"Moving people east hurts families and health care." It can, and we said so in Part 5. That's why the medical unit stays in Salem, video visits expand, and Valley beds go to people close to release.

"The forecast could go up." It could, by about 11 percent either way over ten years. That's why closure depends on readiness conditions, including a sustained population number, and why the plan funds what keeps intakes down. A fixed 2,250-bed prison is the least flexible way to handle an uncertain forecast.

"Earthquakes mean we have to build." Earthquakes mean people shouldn't live in OSP, and this plan gets them out. The main receiving prisons are newer: Snake River (1991), Two Rivers (1999), Deer Ridge (2007).

"It'll hurt Salem." Many OSP jobs stay in Salem at other prisons and the medical unit. About 200 acres near downtown open up for housing and jobs, which is how DOC's own director described it.

"This just pushes costs onto counties." Only if the Legislature skips Recommendations 8 and 9. Those are the point.

SIDEBAR

three states, one region

Oregon locks up fewer people than the national average but pays about twice what Idaho does per day. Each state counts daily cost its own way, but Oregon's high cost per bed and aging buildings are part of why rebuilding OSP at full size is the wrong bet.

	WASHINGTON	OREGON	IDAHO
Imprisonment rate per 100,000, end of 2023 (all states: 318)	181	291	490
Cost per person per day	Not compared yet	$218.36 (2025-27)	$99.66 (FY2025)
Big prison construction decision	Closed McNeil Island in 2011 without replacing it	Weighing a $624M OSP replacement	Building a $112.4M women's prison

Rates are from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Prisoners in 2023*, and count sentenced prisoners serving more than a year. Each state calculates cost per day its own way, so treat that row as a rough comparison.

METHODS

How we did the math

- **Beds.** Physical capacity and April 2026 population per prison: Secretary of State audit 2026-19, Figure 1. Budgeted capacity: Figure 6 (June 2024). Men's capacity excludes Coffee Creek (women and intake) and OSP. The 225-bed medical unit is the middle of our proposed 200 to 250 beds.
- **Forecast.** Men in prison in 2036: Office of Economic Analysis, April 2026 forecast for March 2036. The 5 percent operating reserve is our planning assumption, not a DOC standard.
- **Debt.** Level annual payments on 25-year bonds at 4.5 percent, without issuance costs: about $67.44 a year per $1,000 borrowed. Net debt avoided subtracts payments on the closure route's own construction ($110 million to $170 million, a planning range) from payments on a $624 million or $800 million replacement.
- **Annual costs.** DOC daily costs (May 2026 Quick Facts) times 365.

WHAT THIS BRIEF DOES NOT SHOW

- This is a policy proposal for the 2027 session, not a fiscal note.
- The $624 million replacement cost is DOC's 2024 estimate as reported by KGW. DOC's feasibility study, due in 2027, will update it.
- Budgeted capacity by facility is from June 2024, the latest the audit reports.
- BarNone works with lawmakers of every party in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. We use public data, publish our methods and sources, and take corrections from anyone. We do not endorse candidates or parties.

SOURCES

Where the numbers come from

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BarNone, Inc. is a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) research and policy organization focused on incarceration in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. We turn public data into plain-language findings that lawmakers, reporters, and communities can use.

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