

I am Teresa Walton, Chair of the Central Budget Advisory Committee and I'd like to begin by thanking you Madam Chair and the Board of Commissioners for this opportunity to share our budget priority recommendations with you.

The Central Budget Advisory Committee has members from each of the eight department Budget Advisory Committees (BACs) and is chaired by a member of the Multnomah County Citizen Involvement Committee, in this case me.

We meet regularly during the budget season to provide each other and the Board of Commissioners with input. This allows us to escape from our silos and look at the budget collectively and much the way we count on the Board Chair to do...from a broad community perspective.

As a body, we recognize the necessity for a sizable investment in homeless services and housing and the major shift that represents for ALL the county departments and services. Coming at a time when short lived surpluses are going away and we're again facing the prospect of continual constraints and cuts makes it no picnic in the park for anyone. Especially the populations we serve.

The Central CBAC also understands all too well the scarcity of those 12 years of painful budget cuts – like a million paper cuts. We, along with the rest of the county, also thoroughly enjoyed last year's budget process and outcomes.

This year is the unusual transition year away from abundance. That requires prudent and pragmatic planning with community priorities at the forefront to ensure that the most vulnerable don't get forgotten while the rest of the population survives.

Faced with the initial shock of a 2% constraint, our CBACs and their departments worked over the past several months to shore up their budgets and take hard looks at what could be cut with a minimum of pain to constituents and staff while not compromising essential long term outcomes.

With that in mind, we find that overall, the Chair's budget accurately reflects the values and priorities of our community at large.

And as you might expect, there are a few points of contention.

But first, we thought we'd begin with a few specific "thank-yous" from:

- The brand new Health CBAC for STRYVE and STD Prevention Programs (especially in light of the cuts to the public safety budget),
- The DCHS CBAC for including the Public Guardian and Senior Hunger Initiatives as well as SUN staff restoration and Project Independence among others.
- The NON-D CBAC for the funding to fill the unfortunate gap in state funding for the Office of Emergency Management.
- The Community Justice CBAC for including two of their top three priority recommendations - ASD Recovery and the Forensics Examiner.
- And the DA for simply hearing their priorities clearly and acting accordingly.

And now to the rest of the report:

A surprise to almost no one, at the top of the list of Central CBAC issues is the **Sheriff's Department**.

- Sheriff's department CBAC applauds the investment in homeless services and housing. The clear connection between incarceration and homelessness as well as the consistent misuse of jails as a revolving door warehouse for the mentally ill makes such an investment essential.
- However, the Sheriff's CBAC feels strongly that removing jail beds at this time without a clear and careful transition plan including ready space for those that would otherwise occupy the jail beds is premature.
- Once there are appropriate places and services available, the CBAC would feel much more comfortable with the transfer of funds but until that time, they feel strongly that this is a public safety issue of the utmost importance that requires continued funding.
- **The Central CBAC strongly supports the position of the Sheriff's CBAC and we strongly recommend amending the Chair's budget to include Budget offer #s 60041 I & J**

The **Department of Community Justice** has recommended the addition of a Marriage & Family Counselor funded by diverting funds from the Law Library.

- Family court services stabilizes families and the lives of children impacted by divorce and separation.

- FCS plays a critical role in preventing family dysfunction and distress to children, and greatly reduces the workload of the Family Law Judiciary.
- FCS needs the additional capacity to provide mediation and custody evaluation services to otherwise marginalized families, including domestic violence survivors.
- The needs of vulnerable families should take precedence over the maintenance of a room full of books.
- **The Central CBAC strongly supports the position of the DCJ CBAC and we strongly recommend amending the Chair's budget to include Budget offer # 50052B.**

We also want to bring back an issue that seems to have received less support than in past years – culturally specific services.

There is a disproportionate representation – almost inverse – of newcomers to this country who access services and who are there or represented when decisions get made about budget, policy, and services.

Providing culturally specific services extends far beyond the occasional translation or interpretation and goes deeply into the culture of the county requiring continuing investments in those services as well as rather than instead of other services that affect those communities.

Equitable access to services **MUST** be consistent.

The money and time invested in building relationships and trust **MUST** be supported on an ongoing rather than sporadic basis if we are to spend those resources wisely and well.

Therefore, we specifically again recommend the following:

- **DCS – Elections - Budget offer #91008C**
- The DCS CBAC strongly supported the addition last year of an Elections Voter Outreach position to examine potential institutional barriers and roadblocks to voting in our community.
- The results of the first year represent a good start and clearly demonstrate the need for continued work on this issue. Barriers and roadblocks should NOT exist in ANY form when exercising the sacred right to vote.
- **The Central CBAC strongly supports the position of the DCS CBAC and we strongly recommend amending the Chair's budget to include Budget offer #91008C**
- **DCHS – DV Services - DCHS Budget offers # 25048B & # 25046B.**
- While BIG concerns (Public Guardian & Senior Hunger Initiative) of the DCHS CBAC were funded, items NOT in the Chair's budget this year include three critical services essential to Domestic Violence survivors, especially those MOST vulnerable and members of typically underserved populations – specifically homeless families.

- Research shows that the long term safety of DV survivors is strongly associated with access to culturally specific, peer-based services and the **Central CBAC strongly supports amending the Chair's budget to include DCHS Budget offer # 25048B.**
- Research also shows that access to legal services is imperative to providing a safe and sustainable future for DV survivors. Given the gap that now exists as a result of closures and consolidations, **the Central CBAC also strongly recommends amending the Chair's budget to include DCHS Budget offer # 25046B.**

Non D - OCI Budget offer #10010B

- And finally, there's a tiny proposal buried in the volumes of budget from the Office of Citizen Involvement that deserves your recognition and support. Called **Community Outreach Pilot**, now called Voices of Resilience, it's a one-time opportunity to begin to balance the disproportionate representation of service users from newcomer populations currently at the policy and budget decision making table. **We strongly recommend amending the Chair's budget to include OCI Budget offer # 10010B.**

We also join the NON-D CBAC in encouraging the EMS director to continue to propose the services of an assistant director.

This is an important and pivotal budget year as we prepare for less abundance in budget years to come. We are all used to being asked to do more with less and we understand the delicate balance between budget constraints and community needs.

However, we must stress the need to use the equity filter whenever approaching budget decisions regardless of the state of the budget.

Thank you Madam Chair and Commissioners for the opportunity to share our gratitude as well as our concerns.

Questions?