



## Multnomah County Sheriff's Office overtime: Audit points to increase in overall staffing, not just overtime

staton.jpg

Multnomah County Sheriff Dan Staton will appear before the county board of commissioners Thursday to address why his department went \$508,000 overbudget last year. *(Doug Beghtel/The Oregonian)*

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Multnomah County auditors think **Sheriff Dan Staton** and his staff should stop focusing so much on its staggering overtime costs, and instead address overall staffing costs that have ballooned by more than \$5.7 million in the past three years.

Since 2011, sheriff's office employees' annual hours have risen from 803,019 to 829,538. Meanwhile, the jail population has remained stagnant.

Chief Deputy Drew Brosh says that's because the office is taking in more mentally ill inmates, leading to an increase in "suicide watch" shifts – unscheduled shifts when a deputy must guard an inmate who is at risk for suicide. The increase in mentally ill inmates has also meant more hospital transports, another procedure that forces the office to staff up.

"There are more hours required for the same number of beds," Brosh said. "There's no way to reduce that workload without reducing the number of jail beds."

Overtime has increased 16 percent over the last four years. The office has far exceeded its overtime budget in each of those years, forcing it to draw from money set aside to fill vacant positions. Last year, the office predicted it would spend \$3.57 million in overtime costs. It ended up spending more than \$8 million.

The audit, released Wednesday, dinged the sheriff's office for failing to accurately estimate overtime costs and recommended that the office budget more realistically in the future.

But the audit found that skyrocketing overtime actually helps the office's pocketbook. Paying an average of \$81.35 per hour for overtime means the sheriff doesn't have to spend the \$121.43 hourly cost of wages and insurance for additional employees.

**The audit, released Wednesday**, comes a day before sheriff's office leaders are scheduled to appear before the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners to acknowledge they went \$508,000 over budget last year. **The money was mostly spent on overtime.**

Although the sheriff is independently elected, his \$120 million budget falls under the county's \$1.5 billion budget. He has discretion over how to spend his money.

It is against state law for a county department to spend more than its allocated budget amount without asking the county board for more money, or getting approval for additional grant money or other sources of funding.

Failing to do so puts the county in violation of state law, and means the department at fault must notify the state of the error. After that, they have 30 days to determine how it will correct the mistake.

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