



E-cigarette restrictions, services for homeless and low-income people, health care reform top Multnomah County's legislative agenda

e-cigarette.JPG

An E-cigarette emits a smoke-like vapor, which contains nicotine but no tar. Multnomah County commissioners named regulations on e-cigarettes among their legislative priorities for 2014. (*The Associated Press*)

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Expect to hear a lot from Multnomah County leaders this year about preserving and restoring social safety net funds.

When county commissioners on Thursday approved the county's state and federal legislative goals for 2014, restoring cuts to programs that help the homeless, youth, and those struggling to pay for basic necessities dominated the agenda.

A **full list of the county's yearly priorities** in Salem and Washington, D.C., is on the county's website, but here's a list of highlights:

- Restore state funding for programs that support vulnerable populations. Many of those programs faced a 2 percent "holdback" last year. If that money isn't restored, state services to poor could take a hit.

- Preserve the funding mechanism for programs to prevent juvenile crime and restore full funding for community corrections.

- Restore funding to help house the homeless and those facing emergencies. Those funds have decreased consistently for the past several years, said Nancy Bennett, a county co-director of government relations. County lobbyists hope to convince lawmakers to restore \$3 million to emergency housing assistance, and \$1 million to homeless assistance.

- Keep monitoring the implementation of health care reform.

- Push for an increase to Oregon's tobacco tax, **which is currently, \$1.31 per pack**. By comparison, Washington taxes smokers \$3.02 per pack. The goal, said Claudia Black, the county's co-director of government relations, is to reduce the likelihood that people will choose to smoke.

- Advocate for **restrictions on e-cigarettes**, including a ban on sale to minors. The new-to-the-market

smokeless alternatives to traditional cigarettes are unregulated, and anyone can purchase them. "They can be sold to my 3-year-old granddaughter," Black said. "They can be marketed next to candy."

-In Washington, county lobbyists will push lawmakers not to cut food stamps funding in the federal farm bill. After the program took an automatic **\$5 billion reduction in November**, the House of Representatives is considering another \$8.7 billion in cuts over the next decade, and the Senate is considering a \$4.1 billion reduction. Such cuts would impact tens of thousands of Oregon families, and more than 15,000 families in Multnomah County.

-Advocate for federal funding to maintain and operate county bridges.

-Push for federal grants to supplement county programs.

--Kelly House

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