

OYA Director's Message

October 1, 2009

Greetings, everyone. A lot has happened since I last wrote to you, and I want to give you an update.

Tuesday afternoon I appeared before the Senate Rules Committee to have my appointment as director of Oregon Youth Authority reviewed. I was one of many individuals named by the Governor to various appointments who attended the hearing. Participants included new agency directors, as well as members of boards and commissions. The committee then forwarded its recommendations to the full Senate, which met today. I am pleased to let you know that my appointment as OYA director has been confirmed. I thank the Governor and the Senate for their support.

Even while awaiting formal confirmation it's been a busy two months for me as I've continued to travel across Oregon to meet with our staff, youth and partners.

These visits have been inspiring. Every place I go I meet people dedicated to helping transform the lives of youth. As I recently reported to the Governor, I have discovered everyone at OYA to be full of hope and passionate about the work we are doing.

I have met with staff and youth at our central and north coast facilities in Florence, Tillamook and Warrenton, and to the east in Burns and La Grande. I also have been able to visit Hillcrest, MacLaren and Oak Creek, as well as many of our field offices and several programs operated by partner organizations. By late October I will have visited all of our offices and facilities.

During these trips I also have been able to meet with representatives from many stakeholder groups to learn their concerns and hopes about Oregon's juvenile justice system and the role OYA plays in that system. I am hearing a growing recognition that, in an environment where financial resources cannot keep up with population growth, two things must occur: OYA must continue to focus on evidence-based and efficient service delivery, and Oregon's juvenile justice system must begin emphasizing ways we can focus on prevention.

But my travels are just a part of my activities since I joined OYA in July. I've also had the pleasure of getting to meet our superintendents and camp directors, our SEIU and AFSCME labor management team, parole and probation officers, other state agency directors, and many legislators and local officials. I have been heartened to find out how much everyone cares about the direction and success of OYA.

And it was for the purpose of setting a direction and key priorities for the next few years that the OYA Cabinet held an all-day meeting Sept. 21. It was a very productive and energetic day.

The three key themes of the day were connection, direction and focus – strengthening the connections and communications between Cabinet members, setting a direction for the agency, and providing focus for divisions and programs.

One of the many outcomes was agreement on the top challenges facing OYA – prioritizing agency activities, setting clear expectations, and effectively communicating. As a first step toward clarifying agency priorities, we developed proposed updates to the agency’s vision statement, which we will share with everyone in the weeks ahead. I invite your comments as we move forward with this process.

We also reviewed the Missouri juvenile justice system model and will continue to gather ideas from other states on ways to improve Oregon’s juvenile justice system. While no one model offers the perfect solution for all offenders, each potentially offers some good ideas we may want to adapt.

I also heard many good ideas at this week’s Oregon Juvenile Department Directors Association conference, which drew more than 200 participants, and I will be spending the next few days at the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators leadership conference. CJCA, which is comprised of the directors of all 50 states’ juvenile correctional agencies, meets regularly to share best practices and collaborate on the future of juvenile justice.

As I learn more about what works well in other states, I will share that information with you. And, again, I invite you to share with me what you have found is working well within OYA and elsewhere.

Stay safe and well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colette S. Peters". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Colette S. Peters
Director
Oregon Youth Authority