



Joseph O'Leary

Director
Oregon Youth Authority



Joe O'Leary became the director of OYA in February 2018, after being appointed by Governor Kate Brown and confirmed by the Oregon Senate. He joined the agency as its deputy director in 2013. His professional experience ranges from working as a public defender to advising two governors on public safety and legal issues.

OYA works to keep communities safe by holding youth accountable and providing them with guidance, education, and a support network. As director, Joe is responsible for overseeing the operations of the agency, which serves about 1,400 youth ages 12-24 at any given time — 550 in close custody across the state, and another 825 on probation or parole.

During his tenure, Joe has deepened OYA's commitment to developmental and therapeutic approaches for youth in the agency's care; launched an agency initiative focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion; presided over the construction of new, developmentally appropriate housing and a state-of-the-art high school inside two secure facilities; and fostered the agency's successful effort to reduce its use of secure isolation for youth in custody. Under his leadership, OYA continues to be cited as a national model in helping youth mature into productive, crime-free members of their communities.

Prior to his state government service, Joe was a trial attorney in Portland. He began his legal career as a public defender, which included a stint in juvenile court. Afterward, he spent several years in private practice representing members of law enforcement, corporate officers, lawyers, and employees. Prior to attending law school, he worked in a Latino farmworker community in Central Washington as a volunteer housing program coordinator through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest.

Joe received his undergraduate degree from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. and his juris doctorate from Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland. He has been a member of the Oregon State Bar since 1997 and is admitted to practice in state and federal courts. He also serves as an adjunct professor of law at Lewis & Clark Law School, is a Senior Fellow of the American Leadership Forum of Oregon, and is a member of the advisory board for the Council of State Governments Justice Center.