



# Oregon

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## ***NEWS RELEASE***

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### **State juvenile corrections agency acts on rising gang challenge**

An increase in gang activity and incidents among youth in the care and custody of the Oregon Youth Authority is prompting the state juvenile corrections agency to strengthen how it tracks gang activity, places youth in facilities and assigns gang-related treatment.

OYA has named a gang management coordinator and is actively identifying gang-affected youth at intake and in its facilities.

“We’ve seen an increase in youth-on-youth and youth-on-staff incidents in our facilities,” said Lonnie Jackson, OYA Office of Minority Services director. “We are being more proactive about suppressing rival gang behavior, ensuring safe and healthy living and work environments, and identifying youth who will benefit from gang-related treatment.

“We also know youth who feel safe are more likely to respond positively to treatment.”

Jackson said Franklin “Ron” Weaver, who has been multicultural services coordinator at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn, has been named agency gang management coordinator.

Weaver will help oversee efforts to identify whether individual offenders have gang affiliations, what those affiliations are, and tracking where gang-affiliated offenders originated and are placed in OYA facilities.

Other actions under way at OYA include:

- Creating a steering committee of staff members knowledgeable about gangs from OYA close custody facilities and parole and probation field offices;
- Using OYA’s juvenile justice information system to track affiliation, placement and activities of gang-affected offenders;
- Supporting more interaction with community groups that monitor gang activity;
- Offering an OYA gang-intervention curriculum called Street SMARTS, of which Weaver was the co-author, to residential treatment providers;
- Placing restrictions on offender mail including prohibiting most mail between offenders within a facility or between facilities, as well as with offenders on probation or parole and offenders in Oregon Department of Corrections institutions; and
- Meeting with Oregon Department of Corrections representatives to learn whether the adult corrections agency has undertaken anti-gang measures applicable to OYA.

Jackson said gang members typically are youth – both inner-city and rural – who come from family instability, lack positive role models, are doing poorly in school and gravitate to the power, status and belonging that a gang offers. “They may not see education or employment as a viable option,” Jackson said, “and don’t understand how a job can turn into a career and a career can turn into a future.”

Managing OYA’s anti-gang actions are Jackson and Ken Jerin, the agency’s chief of facility operations.

OYA has custody of approximately 900 offenders ages 12 to 24 in correctional and transitional facilities in Albany, Burns, Florence, Grants Pass, La Grande, Salem, Tillamook, Warrenton and Woodburn, and the agency supervises approximately 1,100 offenders on parole and probation in communities throughout the state.

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