



PUBLIC DEFENDER NEWS

Harvest Time

Rhonda Schaffer, Director

Fall is on the horizon and it is a great reminder that we reap what we sow. So where are we now?

- The Legislative Performance Audit focusing on OPD’s Workforce Management is complete and we are scheduled to go before the Legislative Audit Committee on October 6.
- The Financial Compliance Audit is underway for fiscal years 2019 and 2020.
- The executive budget has been submitted and is currently being reviewed by the Office of Budget and Program Planning and the Central Services Division.
- OPD has not submitted any bill drafts at this time. We will be using a new bill tracking system to allow us to stay on top of bills that may impact our operations.
- The Request for Proposals for the new case management system received seven responses. Evaluations will begin soon.
- We received a grant from the Board of Crime Control to respond to the pandemic, and are in the process of implementing our approved proposals.



Our efforts are reaping benefits and upcoming changes will provide efficiencies. Our agency is moving in the right direction and your work is paying off.

Thank you for all that you do.

Rhonda



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Special points of interest

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Congratulations, IT Staff!

Carleen Green, Central Services Division Administrator

I am very pleased to announce OPD's IT Team has been awarded the 2020 Governor's Award for Excellence! Every year the Governor asks agencies to nominate an individual or a team for this award. Rhonda and the rest of the OPD Management Team agreed the IT Team deserved this nomination due to their hard work and dedication responding to the pandemic. Kyle, John, Jeb and Steven have a wealth of experience they each bring to OPD and it definitely showed, along with their ability to work together in their response to keeping OPD staff online and able to continue serving our clients during the crisis.

Here is the nomination submitted to the Governor, along with all their smiling faces for those of you who may not have met them in person.



Clockwise from top left: John Coulthard, Jeb Myren, Steven St. John, and IT Supervisor Kyle Belcher

"Due to their exemplary performance during this pandemic, OPD's IT Team deserves this award. In an agency of 300, and with limited resources, they significantly preserved OPD employees' productivity by enabling staff to efficiently telework statewide. Working cooperatively, they successfully, and with little disruption, implemented new ways for OPD staff to continue working together, with our clients and with the citizens of Montana by utilizing multiple technology platforms. OPD's IT Team overcame all the obstacles of tele-representation, tele-court appearances and remote access for both our employees and clients keeping the criminal justice system functioning in a time of a worldwide pandemic. Without their service during this pandemic, it would have been very difficult for OPD to continue efficiently and productively working for and with the people of Montana."

I hope you will join me in thanking our IT Team for their dedication to OPD and its mission. Congratulations guys!

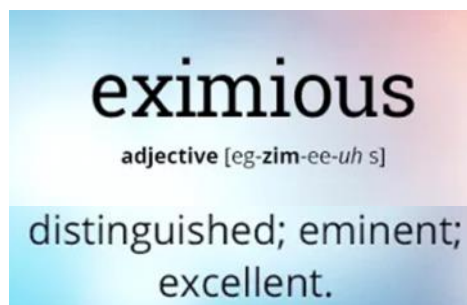
Tips and Tricks

Chelsie Cortez in the Butte Regional office found a useful tip for teleworking.



If you download the One Drive app on your phone, you can use your phone as a mobile scanner. You just take a picture of your document and then choose the file you want to save it in and it will save it as a PDF. You can also scan multiple page documents. The best part—it doesn't save the picture in your camera roll, just to the folder you specify in One Drive.

Thanks for the great tip, Chelsie!



From Dictionary.com's Word of the Day



WELCOME TO OPD!

Dan Miller, Conflict Defender Division Administrator

The Missoula Conflict office added three attorneys to its team in recent weeks. Nick Hyde rejoined OPD after practicing law in California. He previously worked in OPD's Helena office. Bill Lower



Left to right: Nick Hyde, Scotti Ramberg and Bill Lower

brings with him a wealth of experience having worked as a prosecutor for several years. Scotti Ramberg is a newly minted attorney who passed the July 2020 bar exam. She will be sworn in soon and is very anxious to begin representing OPD clients.

Tyna Wright, Accounting Supervisor

Autumn has been a season of change for accounting and eligibility staff. In August, we said farewell to Stacy Leipheimer and wished her great success in her new position with the Montana Department of Transportation.

We will be welcoming Jennifer Skiles-Gannon as an accounting technician beginning in October. Jennifer comes to us from Aware, Inc. and brings well-rounded accounts payable and accounts receivable experience. She will be responsible for our online service provider claim approval, motor pool, and risk management. Please help welcome Jennifer to OPD.

Finally, we are happy to announce a new addition to the OPD family courtesy of hardship examiner Lindsay Boggess and her husband Chad. Welcome Bexli Belle Boggess!

OUR MISSION

We provide effective professional legal services with equal access to quality client-centered representation.

OUR VISION

As trained legal professionals we strive to represent our clients in an effective and efficient manner to ensure a more fair and balanced justice system. We are dedicated and committed to improving overall outcomes for our clients and addressing the conditions that led to their involvement with the justice system.



Representation in COVID Times

Peter Ohman, Public Defender Division Administrator

The pandemic continues and so does the effort to provide quality services to our clients. Thankfully, most judges have been cooperative and empathetic to the needs of clients and attorneys when permitting online appearances or continuing trials. Others have been pushing trials, refusing continuances in the face of clear risk of infection, and packing courtrooms. Lately, the bigger problem has been in the secure facilities.

Outbreaks in the Yellowstone and Cascade jails have put clients at risk and stymied our ability to maintain adequate, confidential communications with inmates. Finding out who is infected, who is in a pod where there is an outbreak, and what options are available to have safe contact with our clients has been a challenge. One jail has taken the position that since face-to-face contacts are still available, our attorneys can meet with infected clients in an enclosed room, so long as both are wearing masks. Given the uncertainties of the virus one has to wonder about this logic.



OPD is working with managers and other stakeholders to find effective ways to communicate with incarcerated clients despite high infection rates. Dedicated video-conference links using Zoom or RealPresence/PolyCom is one option that has been tried in Cascade County. If you are having difficulty maintaining effective contact with your incarcerated clients due to infections, please notify your manager so we can continue to try to address this pressing issue.

Who, Me?!

Cathy Doyle, Director's Office

I grew up in Detroit, and recently came across an [article](#) sent by my aunt commemorating the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Detroit riots (records managers must purge!). In 1968 a reporter wrote, "Most white Americans don't feel like racists. Most of us believe in the basic brotherhood of man, and therefore we can't be racists. Can we?" Still a timely question.

The Kerner Commission [report](#) on the 1967 uprisings shows that we can. White institutions created segregation and poverty, and white society condones it. This type of passive racism permits the structure and institutions of society to grow and adapt to the needs of the white middle class. Good feeling and talk of brotherhood is not enough—there must be structural and institutional change.

Unfortunately, we're still looking for those changes more than 50 years later. The good news is that people are finally talking. Let's try to accept that whatever our virtuous intentions as white people, there is still hard work to undoing racism, and we can contribute to the effort. Emily has more on systemic racism and OPD's initiative on page 5.

SECGC In Progress!

30 Years of State Employees' CHARITABLE GIVING!

September 21 to November 6

As a state employee, you make a big difference in the lives of Montanans, both in the work you do every day and in the donations you make to organizations throughout the state. Research has proven that every dollar given returns a \$3 economic impact in your community.

How much to give? How about starting with one hour's pay per pay period? Of course, feel free to give more, as many state employees do. All donations really do add up for these organizations over the course of the year.

Plus, there are weekly incentive prizes, donated by businesses and nonprofits throughout the state as a thank you. The sooner you give, the more chances you have to win a prize!

Our goal is to break \$460,000 this year for approximately 300 non-profits across Montana. Join us in making Montana the best it can be.

Thank you for your generosity!

Give online (and find out more about weekly prizes!) at charitablegiving.mt.gov



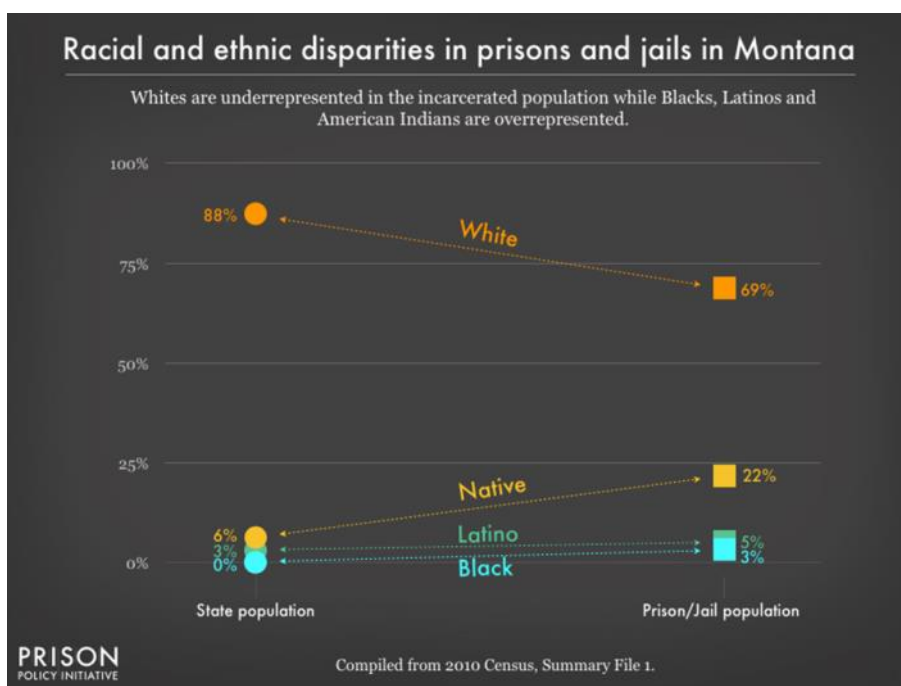
Undoing Racism at OPD

Emily Copeland, Operations Support

“...The work for racial equity is about undoing as much as it about doing. We do not simply build new culture or behavior on top of old, especially in situations that are characterized by oppression. Something must be released, and this letting go does not come easy.” - President Kelly Bates, Interaction Institute for Social Change

Public defense agencies do not have to look far to see the impacts of racism and bias in laws, practices, and clients’ lives. Often, our clients face the brunt of these impacts in addition to the intersecting challenges of poverty, addiction, and unaddressed mental health issues. Montana is not immune to the racial injustices seen nationwide and we only need to review the incarceration rates of people of color to identify a problem in Montana jails and prisons.

[The Prison Policy Initiative](#) finds Montana’s prisons and jails have significant over-representation rates for people of color compared to white people. For example, the 2010 Census found Native Americans comprise 6% of



Montana’s population but are 22% of the prison and jail population. Yet whites total 88% percent of the state’s population, but only 69% of the prison/jail population. Montana’s Latino and Black populations are about 3% and 0% respectively, yet are 5% and 3% of the prison/jail population. Furthermore, the [ACLU found](#) as of 2018 Montana had the highest racial disparity among marijuana arrests

nationwide. Their analysis found Black people in Montana are nearly 10 times more likely to be arrested than white people, despite similar usage rates. Nationwide, Black people are 3.6 times more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts. These national studies begin to capture the bias many public defenders see day-to-day in police stops, sentencing, evaluations, and even simple interactions for people of color in Montana.

OPD is officially undertaking the responsibility to inform our employees and stakeholders while formalizing plans for how we can best address concerns around racism, bias, and inequality in Montana’s criminal justice system. Called the “Undoing Racism” group, we are comprised of attorneys and support staff from multiple divisions across the state. Following initial discussions, the group decided to break into sub-groups to clarify our focus and develop plans to address issues identified by the entire group. We’re currently discussing issues including how best to represent clients dealing with racial injustice; what is a truly inclusive work environment, and how do we create it; how to include other members of the criminal justice system in discussions about their role in stopping bias and racial injustice; how to ensure all of us continue to identify and challenge our own implicit biases; and many others. We look forward to resource sharing for those interested in educating themselves on these topics, and to making action recommendations to management. If you are interested in joining the Undoing Racism group or learning more about the work we are doing, please reach out.

September is Suicide Awareness Month

September is National Suicide Prevention Month. All month, mental health advocates, prevention organizations, survivors, allies, and community members unite to promote suicide prevention awareness.



#BeThe1To is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline’s message for National Suicide Prevention Month and beyond, which helps spread the word about actions we can all take to prevent suicide. The Lifeline network and its partners are working to change the conversation from suicide to suicide prevention, to actions that can promote healing, help and give hope.

The five action steps for communicating with someone who may be suicidal are

1. Ask
2. Be There
3. Keep Them Safe
4. Help Them Connect
5. Follow Up

For more information, visit [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#), [#BeThe1To](#) or [DPHHS’s Suicide Prevention resources](#).

In Montana we have access to a crisis text line—text MT to 741-741—as well as the national hotline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Remember, depression is treatable—suicide is preventable. #BeThe1To

Open Enrollment for 2021 is Coming

Open Enrollment begins October 25. You will have until November 7 to make changes to your 2021 Benefit Elections in the MINE site.

Soon there will be booklets available on the [website](#). Interactive webcasts will be scheduled for October, and a prerecorded webcast will also be available.

You **must** complete the open enrollment process if you want to re-elect Medical/Dependent Care FSA (flexible spending accounts) or Vision Hardware coverage.

Visit the HCBD [website](#) for more information.



Whether you are finding unique challenges related to your physical or mental health due to all the upheaval, are interested in losing weight, are having or considering having a baby, have a chronic condition like diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, or other concerns - **Live Life Well can help with that, and more!**

Check out a short summary of all the Live Life Well benefits [HERE](#), or visit the website for more information: www.benefits.mt.gov/livelifewell.





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