

## **Opening Wapato as Drug Rehab Facility**

**Submitted by Mike Delman**

### **About Mike:**

Mike Delman, a long-time community activist, is director of public affairs for the Portland Habilitation Center and a candidate for the Multnomah County Commission.

### **About the Wapato Rehabilitation Center Proposal:**

Classical economists say an "invisible hand" guides our economy. Well, the hand of the methamphetamine epidemic has smacked us quite visibly in the face. Meth costs Oregonians more than \$400 million annually in property crimes, fires, environmental cleanup, health bills and foster care. The average meth addict commits dozens of burglaries a year. The cost for Department of Human Services caseloads, abused children and their crippled performance in school is incalculable.

Unfortunately, Oregon's prison system merely warehouses most drug-addicted inmates without alcohol and drug treatment, dooming most to recidivism upon their release.

This is a statewide problem, but inside the empty Wapato Jail in North Portland is a statewide opportunity for attacking it. Consider how a pilot program might work:

Rather than have the Oregon Department of Corrections merely warehouse criminals without alcohol and drug treatment, it could send select offenders to Multnomah County, where they can be placed in the Wapato Jail to begin mandatory alcohol and drug treatment.

Every time Corrections diverts an inmate to Wapato, it would save between \$28,000 and \$40,000, or \$4.2 million to \$6 million biennially for Wapato's 150 drug-treatment beds.

The Department of Corrections could take those savings and annually lease Wapato space for \$2 million to \$3 million. That state revenue stream could provide the gap financing necessary for Multnomah County to open part of Wapato.

Existing drug courts could provide the judicial mechanism for moving offenders from expensive incarceration into mandatory alcohol and drug treatment.

The Department of Corrections savings could also provide the funds for staff analysis to confirm that inmates receiving shorter sentences -- with drug treatment -- are less likely to become repeat offenders than if they served longer sentences without treatment.

A fraction of the Corrections savings could provide post-release treatment to ensure the program's success.

Advocating for drug-treatment beds doesn't pack the emotional wallop of hurling convicts into prison. But Oregonians should deplore how the 2007 Legislature swallowed a \$1.1 billion state Corrections budget but choked on a mere \$2 million to restore lost alcohol- and drug-treatment beds. This change in strategy would provide that valuable treatment.

The evidence is getting harder to ignore. Multnomah County Circuit Judges Eric Bloch and Kathleen Dailey run the DUI Intensive Supervision Program with an impressive 3.7 percent recidivism rate. Other counties report similar successes.

The Department of Corrections and Multnomah County Justice Services need to look at partnering with private nonprofits such as the Oregon Partnership and Better People to further leverage and expand resources in prevention and recidivism.

A state strategy for Wapato drug treatment would reduce pressure on the Department of Corrections to propose \$400 million for construction of new prisons in the 2009 Legislature. It could also become a model for other counties.

## **2 Questions:**

*What is your current strategy for moving this idea forward? What is the general timeline?*

The strategy is to coalition build with public safety advocate groups, social and human service organizations, neighbors, business organizations and other political leaders to bring this policy forward at the county.

*Voters in the Progressive Policy Battle Royale commit either money or volunteer time to whichever ideas they support. To what 501c3 organization will your monetary donations go and how will they be used? How will you be able to put volunteers to use and what kinds of tasks will they perform?*

The 501c3's would be Better People and the Citizens Crime Commission and they would work to carry out the strategy above.