

What's The Problem?

(Public Outreach 1.1)

Justice System & Public Safety Services Study Design: 2015 (Study Design)

Web Page: <http://www.hugoneighborhood.org/justicesystemexploratorycommittee.htm>

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Josephine County's Justice System & Public Safety Services Problem/Issue

What is Josephine County's (JO CO) Justice System & Public Safety Services (JS&PSS) Problem, . . . or Issue? First, *What are the public safety services (PSS) being referred to?* Second, *What is the issue?* The third, and final question, perhaps the most important question, is *"Or, is there a problem, and if so, judged by what standards?"*

These three public safety questions are asked within the context of the Committee's and *Study Design's* four core values.

- #1. All Citizens, Voters, Votes, & Values Are Legitimate, Pro & Con.
- #2. Fair Representation of All Values.
- #3. Neutral Point of View.
- #4. Public Is Decision Maker.

As background, JO CO has been in the 2000 Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, from now on referred to as the SRS Act, phase of planning for 15 years, from 2000 - 2015. This phase is a temporary program of declining federal payments, here in JO CO used mostly for PSS, and based on historical timber harvest revenues, rather than current revenues. Question No. 1 was *"What are the public safety services (PSS) being referred to?"* **Six PSS, proposed for funding since 2012**, are generally considered the major components of the CO's historic public safety program: 1. adult jail beds, 2. juvenile justice, 3. district attorney's office, 4. rural patrol deputies, 5. criminal investigations and related sheriff's office support services, and 6. animal protection.

From 2012 - 2015 there have been four CO public safety levies, in as many years, to restore PSS to funding approximating their historic levels. None of them passed. More recently, the City of Grants Pass, Oregon proposed Measure 17-67, which would have enacted a citywide sales tax of 2 percent. It failed at the polls on November 3, 2015.

Question No. 2 was *"What is the issue? We have over a half-dozen sub-questions. The first sub-question is **"Is crime the problem** (i.e., the reason for the levies)?"* In general crime is felonies, misdemeanors, and/or violations. Felony crime includes personal crimes, such as murder, robbery and rape, and crimes against property, including burglary or larceny. **Are the potential causes of crime the problem** (e.g., causes like medium income, homelessness, poverty, unemployment, and economic problems)? This definition, of potential causes, is part of a larger list of *"Variables Affecting Crime"* identified by the FBI.

Is funding public safety services the problem (e.g., property owners revolt, failed levies, mistrust in government, taxes, cumulative costs, and income inequality)? **Is the problem the level of the safety services** (i.e., the levels being not enough, or too much of something). Examples of “level” in PSS are the response to 911 calls, rural patrol presence, number of adult jail beds available, jailed and released, use of resources, diverted monies, and service levels identified by citizens they are willing to fund)? **Is the problem a feeling of fear of being a victim of crime** versus the belief that you can take care of your family if the situation arose?

Is part of the problem because JO CO citizens have never had to understand and debate needed levels and funding for public safety? This situation is because historically the CO government made the decisions to pass through Federal O & C payments to be used mostly for public safety. The public was never really involved in these decisions. Should this aspect of the PSS Problem be considered fresh through a new public planning process decided de novo, meaning "from the beginning," "afresh," "anew," "beginning again?"

Is the problem a feeling that we have considered all the potential solutions, and tried what we thought were reasonable, only to have them fail, arriving a point of not knowing exactly what to do next? Some ways of working toward a desired solution may be useful or even necessary without being sufficient. In dealing with the PSS Problem, citizens sometimes forget this simple point. They observe that some action would undeniably help, or it might even be indispensable. Then they present this action as a remedy, without seriously considering whether it alone would be sufficient. But what we want to know is, what means, if any, a single one or a combination of different ones, might be sufficient to meaningfully address the PSS Problem?

Question No. 3, and the final question, was “***Or, is there a problem, and if so, judged by what standards?***” Understanding and designing solutions are complicated tasks as there are substantial differences between Oregon counties in terms of their geographic and demographic characteristics, priorities, historic crime rates, willingness to tolerate certain levels of crime, and past and present funding of various PSS. A scientific study of the standards the Governor of Oregon would use to proclaim a *public safety fiscal emergency* when fiscal conditions compromise JO CO’s ability to provide a ***minimally adequate level of public safety services*** would help answer the question, “*Is there a problem.*” (MALPSS; 2013 Oregon House Bill 3453). Before the Governor could conduct this analysis, she must have first received a request from the JO CO Board of County Commissioners (BCC), seeking a *declaration of a fiscal emergency*. The rationale for the declaration request must be because the BCC’s analysis finds that the CO is in a state of fiscal distress that compromises the its ability to provide a ***minimally adequate level of PSS.***

In summary, what is JO CO’s Problem, or Issue? The reduction of federal payments to the county since the 2000 Secure Rural Schools Act, especially after 2012, and the failure of four CO public safety tax levies, and one city sales tax, are decisions. The Committee believes these facts are not right or wrong decisions; they are the truth; they are our reality.