

## ***Public Safety Study Design Idea***

**Guest Opinion, by Jon Whalen & Mike Walker<sup>1</sup>**

**Submitted to The Grants Pass Daily Courier:  
January 18, 2016<sup>2</sup>**

What is Josephine County's (JO CO's) Justice System & Public Safety Services (JS&PSS) Problem/Issue (i.e., PSS issue)? After five PSS tax proposals in four years, the public could be excused if it feels exhausted.

The Hugo JS&PSS Exploratory Committee was established in 2013 to research the question, *What can we do to shed some light on the PSS issue?* In 2015 it decided to document "listening" which could be challenged as non-scientific in the sense of the database not being a random sample public opinion survey with a targeted population; this listening database was simply what fellow citizens wrote. The Committee called this project, *Justice System & Public Safety Services Study Design: 2015*, or the public safety *Study Design* idea.

What is the PSS problem? Or, is there a problem, and, either way, judged by what standards and criteria? A scientific study to determine whether JO CO is providing a *minimally adequate level of public safety services* (MALPSS) would help answer the question, "*Is there a problem.*" Answering this question is not about implementing the 2013 House Bill 3453 by turning over PSS to the State. It is about the MALPSS concept as a sound educational analysis tool to assist understanding in a scientific documented way . . . versus relying on professional opinions.

What are the benefits of an educational MALPSS analysis? Under the legal MALPSS process, the CO must first provide to the Governor, a request for a proclamation of a public safety fiscal emergency in a written MALPSS declaration, because an analysis of the CO's fiscal conditions compromises its ability to provide a MALPSS. Next, the State's independent MALPSS analysis conclusion must agree with the CO. Finally, an intergovernmental agreement must be entered into that specifies the PSS activities to be performed by the State, and by what means.

From an educational point of view, the potential CO advisory question to the voters would have significant value for an informed public, if citizens understood the CO's proposed MALPSS declaration/analysis before the advisory question was put to a vote. For example, how do the different PSS elements work together as a system? Otherwise, in the Committee's opinion, the people will not really understand some significant points on what they are voting for, except yes or no, nor whether there was a PSS problem, or not, and by what standards.

JO CO's Management Team's August 19, 2014 recommended strategy elements to identify mandated and elective PSS would be foundational in developing an educational MALPSS analysis.<sup>3</sup> A framework of understanding is significant in realizing where the CO's PSS program stands in the scheme of things. Are we above an emergency level of PSS, or below? Are the PSS adequate, or less than adequate? And, just as important, what are the facts supporting the adequacy determination, beyond the limbo of historical conditions, beliefs, and opinions?

Why support the *Study Design* idea and its major product, an independent, philanthropic-funded, socio-economic, impact *Study*, that purports to represent the citizens in addressing the PSS issue? The Committee has three responses.

Response 1: A key need is how to demonstrate trust and enhance communication between neighbors with different values, and government. *Study Design* proposes a *Study* based on formal vetted inventories and informed decision-making through a unique decision process, *where the citizens identify the problems and potential solutions, and are the decision-makers.*

A scientific analysis of the public's written opinion database is underway by Nathan Davis, a 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate student at Oregon State University, in the School of Public Policy which is part of the Rural Studies Program. His Master's of Public Policy (MPP) will research what the citizens think about public safety, by relying on citizens to identify problems, and formulate their own goals and solutions for the future (e.g., history of voting, writing letters-to-the-editor (LTTE) and guest opinions in *The Grants Pass Daily Courier*, writing arguments in voters' pamphlets, etc.). LTTE are not intended to be representative measures of public opinion; rather, they are measures representing public opinion. The MPP is scheduled for completion the Spring of 2016.

Response 2: Vetted *Study* Baseline Facts/Inventories. Understanding is made more difficult with all those noisy facts when truth isn't always something as clear and unquestionable as desired. It is believed that a step in the right direction is for different folks, that don't trust each other to share vetted, or checked, information. This is one of the purposes – for citizens to speak a common language, to solve problems, to minimize spending valuable time and energy discussing potential conflicting facts. For that purpose, a web page of “*listening*” to baseline information, vetted facts, and disputed facts, has been started for consideration by the public and in *Study*: over 800 letters-to-the-editor; 10 guest opinions, over 650 media articles, 5 voters pamphlets, and several dozen studies and other information publications (e.g., declining federal payments to counties, demographic & population, health, reports of criminal offenses and arrests, budget, MALPSS, fiscal indicators, local crime information, poverty, etc.).

Response 3: Key Outcomes Of *Study Design/Study*. It is difficult when citizens are polarized over the PSS issue and have not yet found a consensus definition of either the public safety problem, or the solution; and its compelling that a significant number of city and county citizens fear for their family's and community's safety because of a decreased number of jail beds, lack of 911 call responses, rural patrol coverage, etc. How will *Study Design* change the way people live? The goal is all about the idea of slow long-range incremental changes, and the confidence that there will be an increase in the number of informed and trusting citizens believing in their future starting to show between 2016 - 2026 (i.e., *More* People know they are being listened to, are better informed, trust the vetted baseline facts/inventories, have a consensus of the problem and potential solutions, etc.).

- 
1. Jon Whalen and Mike Walker are co-authors of *Justice System & Public Safety Services Study Design: 2015*, through membership in the Hugo JS&PSS Exploratory Committee, Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society.  
<http://www.hugoneighborhood.org/justicesystemexploratorycommittee.htm>
  2. Jon Whalen and Mike Walker submitted this guest opinion for consideration of publication to Kevin Widdison, Editor, *The Grants Pass Daily Courier* on January 18, 2016.
  3. JO CO Management Team. August 19, 2015. Exhibit A. *Managers Recommendation on Strengthening County Services to September 3, 2014. Approved Minutes of August 19, 2014 JO CO BCC's Weekly Business Session*. Grants Pass, OR. Web published on *Justice System & Public Safety Services Study Design* page for "Studies & Information" at [http://www.hugoneighborhood.org/JSPSS\\_Studies.htm](http://www.hugoneighborhood.org/JSPSS_Studies.htm).