



DISABILITY RIGHTS OREGON

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MEDIA CONTACT: Elizabeth Seaberry  
Communications Specialist  
Disability Rights Oregon  
Email: [eseaberry@droregon.org](mailto:eseaberry@droregon.org)  
Phone: 503.243.2081 ext. 211  
Mobile: 503.444.0026

## **Disability advocates call for ban on use of canines to intimidate, control, or punish jail inmates**

*Columbia County is the only jail in Oregon to use canines to physically control inmates*

**Portland, Oregon**—Today, the state’s leading disability rights organization released a report on Columbia County Jail’s use of canines to physically control inmates experiencing mental illness. In its report, Disability Rights Oregon called for a statewide ban on the practice of using canines to intimidate, control, or punish jail inmates, saying the use of a police canine to physically control inmates with mental illness is inconsistent with established best practice standards.

This practice captured the public’s attention when graphic video footage from August 2017 showed Columbia County jail deputies using a canine to violently force an inmate to leave his cell. This cell extraction came to light after the [Columbia County Spotlight](#) newspaper pursued the video record of the incident.

In Oregon, Columbia County is the only jail that permits corrections staff to use canines to extract inmates from their cells. Only Oregon and five other states allow the practice.

“Canines should never be used to intimidate or control inmates. This practice poses an unnecessary risk of harm to both deputies and inmates when safer de-escalation strategies are available,” said Emily Cooper, Legal Director of Disability Rights Oregon and author of the report. “For inmates with mental illness, the practice poses a double risk of harm. They may be more likely to be subjected to the use of canines, and those who endure such an incident are at greater risk of suffering physical harm.”

The use of police canines to forcibly remove inmates from their cells runs counter to sound correctional practice and the law, which require:

- The use of force is used only as last resort;
- Staff consider de-escalation and other interventions that address the behavior short of using force; and
- Force is used in manner to minimize injury to both inmates and staff.

Corrections officers may be more likely to subject inmates who experience mental illness to a canine attack when those inmates are struggle to comply with commands due to a disability. Once officers use canines, inmates with mental illness may be at greater risk of physical harm. Inmates who are anxious, overexcited, or delusional may have more difficulty submitting and lying still to avoid being bitten by the canine.

In today's report, "*You Are Going to Get Bitten*': Columbia County Jail's Use of Canines to Intimidate and Control Inmates," Disability Rights Oregon calls for changes in state law to ban the use of canines for intimidation, control, or punishment of inmates.

### **About Disability Rights Oregon**

Disability Rights Oregon upholds the civil rights of people with disabilities to live, work, and engage in the community. The nonprofit works to transform systems, policies, and practices to give more people the opportunity to reach their full potential. For 40 years, the organization has served as Oregon's Protection & Advocacy system.

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