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PRESS RELEASE

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Details: Lincoln County DA Responds to Misleading Information Regarding Staffing Shortage

Recently, there have been several comments online and in the community regarding the staffing shortage in the Lincoln County District Attorney's Office, specifically related to Lincoln County's population size, in response to Commissioner Claire Hall's recent post on her personal Facebook page.

Unfortunately, many of those comments are based on misleading information, causing confusion in the community. Population size alone does not forecast crime statistics or accurately predict the number of essential employees in a District Attorney's Office. This is especially true in high tourism counties like Lincoln, who experience such a high influx of visitors yearly.

When fully staffed, the Lincoln County District Attorney's Office is budgeted for 22 full-time positions, 2 part-time positions, and 8 grant-funded positions – for a total of 32 employees. Prior to the hiring freeze, personnel consisted of 2 office managers, 10 deputy district attorneys, 10 support staff, 5 victim advocates, 2 child support staff, 1 digital forensic analyst, 1 detective, and 1 Deflection coordinator.

Due to the county hiring freeze, the District Attorney's Office is currently operating without the following 11 positions:

- Administrative Chief
- Executive Chief
- 3 Deputy District Attorneys (including 1 grant-funded position)
- Digital Forensic Analyst
- Detective
- 2 Support Staff
- 2 Victim Advocates (part-time, grant-funded)

Using one factor, such as population, to determine adequate staffing levels in the District Attorney's Office is deceptive. Although Lincoln County has a population size of roughly 51,153, the number of criminal cases filed by the Lincoln County District Attorney's Office is more comparable to counties with a population size of 80,000+. In 2025, Lincoln County filed roughly the same number of criminal cases as Benton County, who has a population almost double that of Lincoln County. Additionally, Lincoln County has filed almost 40-60% more criminal cases than similar sized counties like Clatsop County and Columbia County. *See criminal case filing statistics below.*



*Case filings statistics obtained from Oregon Justice Department and are accurate as of 11/11/2025.

**Population information obtained from 2024 Oregon Blue Book Almanac & Fact Book

2025 DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE DATA			
	CASES FILED (YTD)	FELONY TRIALS	DDAs
BENTON (97,720)	1,689	6	12
LINCOLN (51,153)	1,666	22	6*
POLK (88,799)	1,330	18	7.5
CLATSOP (41,785)	1,004	7	7
COLUMBIA (53,639)	676	10	6

*DA's Office is currently operating with 6 criminal DDAs due to vacant frozen positions.

25-26 Budget contemplates a total of 9 criminal prosecutors

Given staffing shortages, the Lincoln County District Attorney's Office is currently operating with a total of 21 employees, with 4 of those positions responsible for enforcing child support judgments and coordinating the deflection program. Due to grant restrictions, these 4 positions are restricted from any

activity related to criminal prosecution, leaving a total of 17 employees dedicated to criminal prosecution (6 criminal deputy district attorneys, 6 full-time support staff, 2 part-time support staff, and 3 victim advocates).

The Lincoln County District Attorney’s Office is responsible for prosecuting any crime that occurs within the borders of Lincoln County. Currently, our five local law enforcement agencies have roughly 90 patrol officers and/or detectives investigating criminal activity, making arrests, and referring charges for prosecution. *See breakdown below.*

2025 PATROL OFFICERS/DETECTIVES BY AGENCY	
Oregon State Police	12 Troopers
Sheriff’s Office	27 Deputies
Newport Police Department	18 Officers
Toledo Police Department	6 Officers
Lincoln City Police Department	27 Officers

Each case is then assigned to and reviewed by a deputy district attorney to make a charging decision. Unfortunately, criminal activity does not subside during staffing shortages – leading to an increase in caseload that often becomes overwhelming.

Over the past seven months, District Attorney Jenna Wallace has repeatedly requested exceptions for 4-5 key public safety positions currently affected by the hiring freeze, including requests to fill three deputy district attorney positions. However, Commissioner Claire Hall and Walter Chuck have denied those requests, behind closed doors, without any response, discussion, or public hearing. DA Wallace spoke publicly at the Lincoln County Board of Commissioner’s meeting on October 1, 2025, and November 5, 2025, pleading for immediate exceptions to the county-wide hiring freeze given public safety concerns due to crime rates, challenging caseloads, and staffing shortage.

As of September 2025, Lincoln County has seen a 24% increase in caseload this year, while simultaneously experiencing a shortage of prosecutors, and is projected to file over 1,850 criminal cases by end of year. This does not include a backlog of over 360 cases awaiting review. DA Wallace raised fears that limited staffing and the inability to hire employees will negatively impact criminal prosecution in Lincoln County. DA Wallace stressed that if Commissioner Hall and Chuck continue to prevent the District Attorney’s Office from hiring employees into historically funded positions, community safety, accountability, and justice will be negatively impacted.

At the November 5, 2025 BOC Meeting, DA Wallace stated,

I want to make it clear as it appears there was confusion when I spoke previously. I am not asking for any additional positions or funding. I am simply advocating

for the ability to use the budget provided to me and hire personnel into already established and approved positions adopted through the 25-26 budget process by you, the Board of Commissioners.

The District Attorney's Office, under DA Wallace, has never requested additional funding or new positions. The District Attorney's Office has consistently underspent over the past decade, contributing hundreds of thousands of dollars back to the general fund at the end of every budget cycle. DA Wallace's freeze exception requests would leave four remaining frozen positions in the District Attorney's Office to assist in resolving the County-created budget deficit, which seems like a reasonable compromise to promote public safety while balancing the budget deficit. Regrettably, over Commissioner Casey Miller's objection, Commissioner Chuck refused to discuss DA Wallace's public request on both October 1, 2025 and November 5, 2025. Neither Hall nor Chuck have made any effort to contact DA Wallace outside of public comment for additional discussion.

"I am struggling to understand why Commissioner Hall and Commissioner Chuck will not grant exceptions to the hiring freeze, specifically four key public-safety positions in the District Attorney's Office that are essential for criminal prosecution. I need to be able to use the resources already allocated to my office through the public budget process to continue to promote community safety and accountability in Lincoln County. As the Commission Chair and member of the Budget Committee, Hall approved and adopted the current Lincoln County budget without raising any concerns regarding overstaffing or overfunding in the District Attorney's Office. In fact, no one involved voiced concerns that the District Attorney's Office was overstaffed or overfunded. If Commissioner Hall had overstaffing concerns, why did she approve and adopt the current budget?" DA Wallace says her office just doesn't have the ability to give every case the attention it deserves, while also being short three prosecutors. Until Commissioner Hall and Chuck rescind the hiring freeze or approve public safety exceptions to freeze, the District Attorney's Office will be unable to keep up with the demand and may be forced to prioritize which cases can be feasibly charged with limited staff.

The Lincoln County District Attorney's Office is committed to transparency, accountability, and open dialogue. The District Attorney's Office is in the process of organizing an upcoming public Town Hall to engage directly with members of our community. This event will provide residents with an opportunity to learn about the District Attorney's Office, discuss public safety concerns and community priorities, and ask questions and share feedback directly with DA Wallace. DA Wallace hopes Commissioner Hall and Chuck will accept her invitation to attend as panelists to share insight and answer questions regarding this impactful topic to build a safer, more supportive community for all. Date, time, and location will be released in the upcoming weeks.