Re: Governor’s Executive Order and “Stay Home, Save Lives”

Over the last several weeks, many in our community have reached out to my team at the Sheriff’s Office asking about the Governor’s Executive Order, how we are adapting services, and if my deputies will be enforcing the order. The last several weeks have been a challenging time for our community, adapting to social distancing, the temporary closure of schools, local businesses, and countless other changes to our daily lives which are foreign to what we are accustomed to. This is a challenge for each of us. Together we must balance our interests between the health and safety of our community members while preserving our local economy and maintaining individual rights.

As the Sheriff of Marion County, my office’s first priority is to promote public safety through service to our community. To protect our community’s interests, we enacted many changes to operations at the Sheriff’s Office which included limiting access to our facilities, adapting our responses to calls for service, and modifying jail operations to help reduce the risk of the spread of the virus. Each of these decisions were made with the intention of preserving the health and well-being of our community, staff, and the adults in our custody whom we are entrusted to care for.

Our team here at the Sheriff’s Office is focused on educating community members about the risks involved if they do not follow the advice of the medical experts related to this pandemic. We recognize many local business owners are assessing the difficult decision on how and when to safely reopen. If a business decides to open contrary to the restrictions put in place by the Governor, that is a decision the business owner makes. For businesses that do not comply with the Governor’s Executive Orders there are state regulatory agencies which are already entrusted to address health, safety, and licensing throughout Oregon.

Through the Oregon State Sheriffs’ Association (OSSA), Sheriffs from all 36 counties in Oregon have the ability to discuss issues surrounding a variety of topics which impact offices all over the state. Over the past month and a half, we have had many conversations focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts it has on our staff, operations, and our communities. To ensure our ability to make well informed decisions, OSSA receives guidance regarding many issues which uniquely impact the Office of Sheriff in all 36 counties, including various matters coming from the Governor’s Office related to the pandemic. Each sheriff in the state also has their own legal counsel who advises on these same topics as well as matters which have a direct impact specific to their local communities. The opportunity to communicate with all Sheriffs in Oregon through OSSA is a priceless resource for every Sheriff.
As the Sheriff of Marion County, with the help of Marion County Legal Counsel and OSSA, we have been well informed of the authority and legal responsibilities surrounding the Office of Sheriff. The Sheriff’s Office made statements at the beginning of this Statewide issue that we are not focused on any criminal enforcement of the directives and orders given at the State level, and when contacted are referring people to the State agencies for more information. We continue to focus on education throughout this crisis. We will continue to emphasize communication and education with our community members, placing significant value in the long-term well-being of our community as a whole.

I will continue to work with elected officials in Marion County, and throughout the State, to advocate for the safe re-opening of Marion County and the State of Oregon in a manner that is recommended by our public health experts that also preserves our local economy, and safeguards the rights of our community members.

Joe Kast, Sheriff