

*Vice Report - Detention Home*

Portland, Oregon,

June 6, 1913.

To the Honorable Mayor-elect  
and Members-elect of the City Council of Portland.

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*H. R. Albee*

Gentlemen:-

Six weeks ago the Mayor appointed a committee of five citizens to investigate and report on the desirability of a Detention Home for women offenders, with a hospital ward for venereal disease, and to submit tentative plans and estimates. About two weeks ago in response to a memorial from the Oregon Prisoners' Aid Society, this committee was enlarged by the appointment of five additional members and directed to report on the desirability of an Industrial Home for male vagrants, drunkards and drug fiends.

The first action taken by the committee was to petition the Council to offer an amendment to Subdivision 3 of Section 73; to provide for the punishment of a violation of any ordinance of the city by a fine not exceeding Five Hundred Dollars (\$500), or by imprisonment, or by both, or by confinement in a house of detention or industrial home, such as may hereafter be provided by ordinance, and for working any person sentenced to such confinement during the term thereof, and to provide for the punishment of any such person who shall refuse to work when ordered. Such imprisonment in jail shall be for a term not exceeding six (6) months, but in case of commitment to a house of detention or industrial home it shall be for a term not exceeding two (2) years; provided, however, that any inmate of such jail, house of detention or industrial home may be paroled or released, if in the judgment of the Council such action is advisable, before the sentence is fully served.

This amendment was adopted on June 2nd by a vote of 19,743 for, to 13,030 against, thus indicating a strong interest in the proposed change in the plan of treating women and men offenders.

The committee plans to report fully on the whole subject at an early date, but in view of the fact that you will take charge of the city government on July 1st and will appoint certain officers who will deal directly with delinquents, the committee desires very respectfully to call your attention to some conclusions to which it has come as the result of its own study as well as from the investigations and report of the Vice Commission, five members of which are on this committee.

The committee believes that there should be a change in the policy of the police department in arresting petty offenders and haling them before the police court. The best policemen make the fewest arrests, but there is a tendency among officers to try to make a record by the number of arrests and convictions. The police judge discharges some cases and suspends sentence in many more, and that creates friction between the two departments. The City Attorney or his deputy, who is the prosecuting officer in the police court, is not in sufficiently close touch with the police department to know anything about the charges made against arrested persons until after they have been made in the police blotter. Heretofore the fact that the police judge was elected by the voters tended to make him independent of the policy of the other departments.

This committee believes that if the City Attorney or his deputy should be directed to act in an advisory capacity to the police department, that it would result in fewer arrests, less expense to the city in caring for prisoners, and less demoralization to individuals who are somewhat weak and irresponsible.

To secure the best results, this plan would involve the selection of a Chief of Police who would use all his efforts to make the force efficient with as few formal attests as possible. It would also call for a police judge of unquestioned integrity and possessing a capacity to deal wisely with offenders.

This committee realizes the great responsibilities and difficulties with which your honorable body is confronted in establishing a new administration of the city business, and it hesitates to propose reforms before you have actually taken the oath of office. At the same time it seems not improper to point out that in the important matter of dealing with some 1500 or more delinquents every month through the agency of three departments that have heretofore acted somewhat independently of each other, a clear knowledge of the facts will enable you to establish the foundations of a far-reaching reform through the wise selection of a Chief of Police, Municipal Judge and City Attorney and his deputies.

This will doubtless involve the payment of larger salaries than are paid to these officials at present, but if the heads of these three departments could agree on some constructive policy in dealing with violations of city ordinances, and would work in measurable harmony, it would result in a saving of thousands of dollars to the tax-payers and in the saving of individuals from permanent delinquency.

Trusting that this communication will be received as a most respectful suggestion concerning a complex and difficult problem which we were appointed to investigate and report upon, we have the honor to subscribe ourselves as members of the Detention Home and Industrial Home Committee,

George A. Thacher Chairman

Aristone N. Felts Secretary

Gretchen H. Corbett

Sarah Whiteside

W. J. MacLaren

W. J. McQuitt

Philip Bauer

Arthur Evans Wood

Millie R. Trumbull

V. F. Manning