

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of County Commissioners
FROM: Cindy Becker, Project Manager, County Administration
RE: Public Safety Levy Research & Next Steps
DATE: July 28, 2026

REQUEST: Board direction on the timeline and next steps for referral of a Public Safety Levy measure to the ballot of an upcoming election.

BACKGROUND: The Clackamas County Public Safety Levy is a countywide voter-approved funding measure that supports a variety of law enforcement, jail operations, and public safety programs. It provides funding to maintain staffing, equipment, and services. It is renewable every five years. The Public Safety Levy was first approved by voters in 2006 and approved again in 2011, 2016, and 2021, representing 20 years of public support. The current Public Safety Levy will expire on December 31, 2026.

Renewal of the levy (Measure 3-633) was on the May 2026 election ballot and failed by a wide margin:

- 62.13 %/No and 37.87% /Yes
- Election Turnout: 44.86% of registered voters

The Board of Commissioners discussed next steps at the June 2, 2026, Policy Session; specifically, whether to refer the levy to the ballot again for either the November 2026 or the May 2027 election.

Timelines for Referral to November 2026 Election

- 7/23 BCC directs staff to move forward with ballot language
- 8/4 Ballot language finalized and shared with BCC
- 8/11 BCC formally refers measure to ballot
- 8/14 Last day to file with Local Elections Official
- 8/14-21 Measure certified to ballot and advocacy restrictions begin
- 11/3 Election Day

Identification of Issues/Needs

Per Board direction at the June 2 session, staff engaged the services of an external contractor with experience in public safety ballot measures. The selected contractor, Praxis, met individually with Board members and the Sheriff on July 14, 2026, to gain their perspectives on next steps. The following general themes emerged from these meetings:

- Clearer messaging
- Demonstration of value of levy funding
- Coordination of broader messaging to public (Mayors, Local Police Departments) and private (Business leaders, Chambers) stakeholders
- Collaboration between Board and Sheriff's office
- Clarity of roles, specifically who's leading this effort

The consultant's recommendation, based on their initial assessment of the themes identified and the time to address them, is to plan for a May 2027 ballot referral. This would allow for the following:

- A clear structure defining roles and responsibilities for the Board, Sheriff's Office, and staff and an opportunity for greater collaboration
- A detailed timeline and action plan
- A comprehensive public engagement strategy before and after the levy referral
- Coordinated communications and education efforts before the vote
- Refined messaging to help voters connect with the work of the Sheriff's office and understand the value of levy funding

After deciding on a timeline, the Board will need to determine whether to maintain the current referral package or whether to adjust the services and/or funding request.

OPTIONS:

Staff seek Board direction on the timing of a future public safety levy: pursue a November 2026 ballot referral or a May 2027 ballot referral.

RECOMMENDATION: None.