



PUBLIC SAFETY COORDINATING COUNCIL

Wells Ashby, Chair
Presiding Judge

April 2, 2019

Tom Anderson, Vice Chair
County Administrator

Senator Jackie Winters
Representative Carla Piluso
Co-Chairs, Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee

Aaron Brenneman
Attorney at Law

Barb Campbell
Bend City Council

Sent by e-mail only: (to jwmps.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov)

George Conway
Health Services Director

Re: HB 2239 - Creating New Circuit Court Judgeships

Sara Crosswhite
911 Service District Director

Dear Senator Winters and Representative Piluso:

Anthony DeBone
County Commissioner

The Deschutes County Public Safety Coordinating Council supports the creation of an additional circuit court judge for the 11th Judicial District serving all of Deschutes County. Since 2003, the last time a judge position was added in Deschutes County, the population has increased by 45%. A similar increase in the number of judges would result in 3.15 additional positions.

J. Kenneth Hales
Community Justice Director

Jeff Hall
Trial Court Administrator

This significant deficit in judicial resources plays out in very real ways in the justice system that serves people living in and visiting Deschutes County. As of the date of this letter, criminal trials were being set out into September, 2019 and most of the daily criminal trial calendars within the next three months are overset by one to three trials. This means that the court schedules eight to eleven criminal trials to start Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of each week. With trial settings so far out, it is not surprising that a recent report by the Office of Public Defense Services found that Deschutes County has one of the lowest criminal trial rates in the state. The lack of judicial resources also means that defendants that plead guilty are set for a separate sentencing hearing that is four to six months from the day the plea is entered. As professionals working in and with the criminal justice system, we can all attest that the immediacy of accountability has a significant, positive impact on defendants. Conversely, the delay in sentencings in Deschutes County seriously undermines the degree to which defendants perceive they are being held accountable for their actions.

John Hummel
District Attorney

Donna McClung
Oregon Youth Authority Superv

Shane Nelson
Deschutes County Sheriff

Jim Porter
Bend Police Chief

Shelly Smith
Citizen Member

Dave Tarbet
Redmond Police Chief

Don Wagner
Oregon State Police Commande

Consistent with the community health focused culture of Deschutes County, the Public Safety Coordinating Council is also concerned about the impact of a severely under resourced court system on the children in our community. It would be easy to demand that the court simply redirect judges to criminal cases, but this would only hurt the children in our community as juvenile dependency and family law cases would receive even less attention than they do today.

Keith Witcosky
Redmond City Manager

Finally, the Council would note that the Circuit Court in Deschutes County continues to innovate. The Court piloted a simplified trial process in divorce cases for people without attorneys which is set to be adopted for use statewide this August. The Court is currently participating in a project to manage dependency cases differently with a goal of reducing the number of children in foster care for more than two years. But, the Court cannot innovate its way out of the current resource deficit. A new judge position and attendant staff are required if the Court is to provide a minimally adequate level of justice in our community.

The Council voted unanimously today to authorize me to submit this letter on its behalf.

Sincerely,



Hon. Wells B. Ashby, Chair



Tom Anderson, Vice-Chair

Cc: Sen. Tim Knopp
Sen. Cliff Bentz
Sen. Dennis Linthicum
Rep. Mike McLane
Rep. Cheri Helt
Rep. Jack Zika
Rep. Daniel Bonham