

**TESTIMONY ON HB 2239
VETERANS TREATMENT COURT
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
February 04, 2021**

**PRESENTED BY HON. ILISA ROOKE-LEY (RETIRED)
LANE COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT
OREGON JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT**

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chair Noble, Vice-Chair Power, and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Ilisa Rooke-Ley. I am a recently retired Circuit Court Judge from Lane County. I am here today on behalf of the Oregon Judicial Department.

The Oregon Judicial Department has been a leading advocate for the development and expansion of problem-solving courts for three decades – establishing Oregon’s first drug treatment court in 1991, only the second such court in the nation at that time. Today, Oregon Circuit Courts operate 67 specialty courts across 27 judicial districts. Most judicial districts have at least one specialty court; some have many, designed to reach specific defendant populations in the court.

Chief Justice Walter’s 2020-2021 Strategic Campaign emphasizes this long-term commitment and rededicates the OJD to the expansion of problem-solving courts.

Commitment 1 - We will join with community partners to improve services and outcomes for people who are underserved, vulnerable, or marginalized; and we will develop effective, supportive, and creative solutions to respond to their legal needs

1.5 We will continue efforts to expand problem-solving courts, such as veteran, family, and mental health treatment courts.

The OJD has partnered with the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC), Oregon’s treatment court granting entity, to develop Oregon’s Specialty Court Standards to guide and further define best and promising practices by which specialty courts can measure their performance to achieve positive outcomes.

Problem solving courts (including specialty and treatment courts) are based on a collaborative multi-disciplinary team approach intended to connect participants with mental health and/or substance use disorders that contribute to their criminal behavior with community treatment resources and services, resulting in reduced recidivism and improved public safety.

These courts serve a specific population who meet agreed-upon eligibility requirements, and yield far better outcomes for individuals and communities. These positive outcomes are achieved through a commitment from the participant and all team members - judge, court coordinator, district attorney, defense attorney, law enforcement, probation, treatment provider, and peer mentor. In the case of veterans’ treatment courts, a key team member is the county Veterans Service Officer (VSO) who can direct the veteran participants to services they are due because of their service to our country.

The local nature of these courts is a significant component of what makes them successful. Community members work together to connect the veteran to local resources and services. The county VSO directs the court participant to services in their community that they are eligible for.

Today we have 5 veteran treatment courts in Oregon. We also have other courts that use a hybrid model with a veteran specific docket. Again, the value of these programs is the local connection to services.

This background provides context to emphasize the role OJD plays in making these courts work and our intent to continue expansion of specialty court opportunities across the state. The intent of HB 2239 is consistent with these efforts and we support the intent to expand veterans' treatment courts in Oregon.

We have engaged in conversation with Representative Wilde and other proponents of the bill to identify some technical issues we believe could be clarified to better achieve the intent of the sponsor, and feel confident that we can create more opportunities for Oregon's veterans.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.