

**Testimony of the Oregon State Bar
in Support of SB 296
Before
Senate Committee On Veterans and Emergency Preparedness**

February 4, 2021

The mission of the Oregon State Bar is to serve the public interest by regulating the legal profession, improving the quality of legal services, and advancing a fair, inclusive, and accessible justice system. As an instrumentality of Oregon's courts with a commitment to protecting the public, the bar supports the courts' efforts to balance access to justice and essential court services, while protecting the health and safety of all court users and judiciary personnel.

Over the last year, the Oregon State Bar and its members supported the Oregon Judicial Department's efforts to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Bar members have shared suggestions, participated in OJD work groups, and volunteered their time and expertise. The bar appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the judicial branch and the legislative branch on the critical nature of our judicial system.

This past summer, the Oregon State Bar submitted testimony in support of HB 4212 which passed during the First Special Session of 2020. The bill provided, in part, that the Chief Justice had the authority to modify or postpone both civil and criminal deadlines and filing requirements during the COVID-19 state of emergency. In addition, the bill tolled the statute of limitations as necessary to address limited access to the court system.

Senate Bill 296 would ensure that the Chief Justice would have the tools at his or her disposal to respond quickly if a future state of emergency was called. The bill would allow the court to extend or suspend timelines and allow for electronic court appearances.

The Oregon State Bar believes the courts, lawyers, as officers of the court, and the Oregon State Bar, as an instrumentality of the court, are critical to ensuring access to the court system for Oregonians. The proposed legislation provides the Oregon Judicial Department with the flexibility to respond appropriately while ensuring access to justice for all Oregonians. The Oregon State Bar is committed to continuing to work with the Oregon Judicial Department and the legislature on these important issues.