



Oregon Association of Justice Attorneys

AFSCME Local 1085

Bend • Eugene • Medford • Pendleton • Portland • Salem

Senate Judiciary Committee
900 Court St. NE
Salem Oregon 97301

Senator Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Heather L. Weigler. I am a Senior Assistant Attorney General and an Executive Committee member of the Oregon Association of Justice Attorneys, AFSCME Local 1085. I urge you to adopt Senate Bill 424 to help our agency attract better applicants and bring fairness to how we set wages for Oregon Department of Justice attorneys.

I have now served the state of Oregon for 13 years. In my time as an Assistant Attorney General, I have seen how failure to pay comparable wages to other public sector attorneys hurts recruitment and morale. My colleagues consistently go above the call of duty on behalf of the people we serve. We protect children and reunite families in the juvenile dependency system, shield Oregon consumers from fraud and exploitation, and defend charities from unscrupulous fiduciaries and fundraisers. State government relies on us to advise and defend state government – including the legislature and its members-- in our trial and appellate courts.

To do that important work well, the Department must recruit outstanding legal talent. Once attorneys are hired, they receive training and experience to develop unique skill sets and acquire specialized knowledge that allows them to provide top quality legal services. These are skills that are in demand, and when our wage scale is set too low, we risk losing those talents and skills to other public entities. Attorneys work for the state because we care about Oregon and her people, and we want to stay with the Department of Justice – as long as we are fairly compensated.

Unfortunately, too many public employers offer salaries the Department cannot match. That is in no small part because the current statute artificially limits the comparable wage market to Attorney Generals' offices in contiguous states where attorney wages are not subject to collective bargaining, unlike many of Oregon's public employers. The current statute hampers the efforts of Oregon's Assistant Attorneys General to be paid fair wages through collective bargaining and limits the Department of Justice's ability to compete for legal talent with other public employers in Oregon. The current statute SB 424 would fix this problem by allowing labor arbitrators to consider the wages of public sector attorneys doing substantially similar work when assessing the wages of Assistant Attorneys General.

SB 424 will ensure my colleagues at the Department of Justice will continue to be the best and brightest the legal profession has to offer. I urge you to adopt it. Thank you for your time today.