

**Testimony before
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Public Safety
In support of House Bill 5012**

April 14, 2021

Co-Chairs Gorsek, Sollman, and members of the committee,

My name is Liani Reeves and I am entering my twentieth year of practice as an attorney in Oregon. I am privileged to have just finished my term serving as the 2020 Oregon State Bar President. Throughout my career, I have worked with underserved communities through various boards and commissions, including serving as President of the Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs.

The mission of the Oregon State Bar, an instrumentality of the Oregon Judicial Department, is to serve justice and the public interest by promoting respect for the rule of law, by improving the quality of legal services, and by increasing access to justice. As a member of the Oregon State Bar's Board of Governors, I urge this committee to support full funding for the Oregon Judicial Department. In addition, I encourage the subcommittee to support one-time funding for the Oregon Civil Legal Access Portal Pilot Project.

The Oregon State Bar has partnered with the Oregon Judicial Department and Oregon's legal service providers to develop the Oregon Civil Legal Access Portal Pilot Project. This portal is intended to create an online, centralized, professionally staffed, legal information and navigation portal. The project will allow Oregonians to more seamlessly access legal information and assistance in key, high-needs areas such as housing, domestic violence prevention, health care, and employment. It will provide civil legal information in a culturally-accessible, user-designed online format so that all Oregonians can understand their rights and obligations, be heard by the justice system, and actively engage. The Oregon Civil Legal Access Portal Pilot Project will serve the bar's public mission and increase access to justice.

No matter where you are located or your level of internet savvy, finding legal information and assistance on the internet is overwhelming. In Oregon, it can be even more overwhelming because trusted legal information providers like the courts, the bar, and legal aid all maintain independent websites, each with their own information. Information gaps, siloed resources, and difficult to understand web pages persist because no one organization has adequate capacity to prioritize a comprehensive, user-focused online legal information portal.

Interactive online portals, similar to the Oregon Civil Legal Access Portal Pilot Project, offer targeted legal resources on demand. Several states have launched portal projects that have been lauded for their positive community impact and high traffic volume. Prior to the pandemic, 92% of landlord-tenant cases and 87% of family cases in Oregon's courts had at least one unrepresented party. Legal aid's funding level leaves 84% of low-income Oregonians suffering legal problems without help of any kind. The pandemic and eviction moratoriums have slowed the court's handling of cases while Oregonians continue to experience legal issues. The Oregon Civil Legal Access Portal Pilot Project will connect Oregonians to curated resources that can quickly guide users to relevant legal topics and resources.

The Oregon State Bar supports a one-time funding request for \$2 million to support the buildout of the portal and project development costs. The Oregon Judicial Department, Oregon State Bar, and the civil legal aid providers have begun the development process by investing staff time, resources, and seed money in the portal project.

The Oregon Civil Legal Access Portal Pilot Project will focus on program development and implementation of the portal including literacy/plain language, translation services, culturally-sensitive navigation, substantive legal content, web accessibility, usability, and technical experts. One-time funding from the American Rescue Plan Act will help build a strong foundation for the further development of the project.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Liani Reeves
Past President, Oregon State Bar