



**Litowich Law**

Family & Estate Lawyers

April 22, 2021

Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner-Hayward, and Rayfield,

My name is Katherine Denning and I am a resident of District 5. I am a family law attorney in private practice and a member of the Oregon State Bar's Board of Governors. I urge this committee to support full funding for the Oregon Judicial Department including funding for court pass-through entities such as: civil legal services, the Oregon Law Commission, and the Council on Court Procedures. As a practicing attorney and resident of District 5, I appreciate the Oregon Legislature's support of the court system in my community.

As you may remember, over the last few legislative sessions the legislature has provided funding for seismic retrofitting of the Oregon Supreme Court. This focus on courthouse safety, which has been a priority of the legislature over the last decade, is appreciated by all users of Oregon's court system.

The mission of the Oregon State Bar 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. The judicial branch touches the lives of thousands of Oregonians every day. From supporting crime victims, to facilitating Oregon business and economic development, to resolving issues for families in crisis, Oregon courts are a critical part of what makes Oregon work. Our courts are involved in resolving disputes that may seem big or small from the outside. For those involved, however, each case is important.

We believe that strong courts help build strong communities. With that in mind, our concern at the Oregon State Bar is to make sure that Oregon's court system can operate as efficiently and effectively as possible while supporting each Oregonian in their efforts to engage with the justice system. The bulk of the work moving thousands of cases through the courts each day is done by hundreds of dedicated employees at local courthouses. Our courts cannot run without their contribution, and indeed, cuts to this workforce over the past decade have created challenges for Oregon's justice system.

The courts have made up for many of these cutbacks by embracing new technology, such as Oregon eCourt, but cuts to staff at our courthouses inevitably mean delays not just for those accused of crimes, but also for crime victims, businesses, witnesses, jurors, and everyone else who conducts business in our courts. We strongly support funding for adequate court facilities, enhanced service options, streamlined processes and forms, and sufficient staffing of the judicial branch itself. Looking forward, the Oregon Civil Legal Access Portal Pilot Project, an online civil legal

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information and navigation portal, is a next step in merging the court's commitment to harnessing technology and access to justice.

Over the past year Oregon has been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, a sudden and extreme recession, a robust conversation concerning racial justice, and active wildfires burning through many of our communities. Almost every aspect of our judicial system have been affected by these events. The Oregon Judicial Department implementation of remote and socially distanced court protocols allowed cases to move forward as we addressed these challenges.

The next step is a return to in-person access to our courthouses for all. Oregon's courts will need to manage an unprecedented backlog of cases that resulted from limits imposed on in-person hearings. Any cuts to the Oregon Judicial Department's budget may create barriers and result in justice delayed. With the goal of providing court access to all, the Oregon State Bar supports full funding for the Oregon Judicial Department.

Thank you for your support of our justice system over the years and your time and consideration today.

Sincerely,



Katherine Denning  
Oregon State Bar Board of Governors  
Chair, Public Affairs Committee