
DATE: Thursday April 29, 2021
TO: Senate Judiciary and Ballot measure 110 Committee
FROM: Taylor Steenblock, Multnomah County Government Relations
RE: SB 188 A, East County Courthouse

Dear Chair Bynum, Vice Chairs Noble and Power and members of the committee,

I write today to urge your support of SB 188 as amended. This bill would expand Multnomah County's ability to hear cases at the east county courthouse in Gresham. The bill provides the court with greater flexibility to schedule proceedings in the East County Courthouse in appropriate cases, while still ensuring that felony traffic cases cannot be heard at the East County Courthouse. The amendment will maintain that felonies cannot be heard in East County but allows for violation offenses.

The East County Courthouse (ECC), which is a joint state-county asset, is currently underutilized. Even pre-COVID-19, there are some days during the week where no cases were scheduled or heard. We intend to maximize the use of the East County Courthouse by removing statutory barriers to hearing more misdemeanors at the ECC. Access to a convenient courthouse is an important service for our East County Residents. We believe that we should meet them where they are rather than asking for them to overcome many barriers to attend proceedings or access other services downtown.

Under current state statute, if a defendant has been in custody at any point during their case, the case is required to be heard at the downtown courthouse. This bill would allow all misdemeanors occurring east of 122nd to be heard at the East County Courthouse unless the person is currently in custody at the time of a proceeding, has a warrant, or is charged with a felony case. The lack of a holding cell in the ECC is the reason for the latter constraints, but this is not an issue with misdemeanor cases where the person has been released. It was estimated by the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office in 2020 that as a result of the changes made in section one of this bill, we could see approximately 2400 additional matters in the ECC for an estimated total of 6700 matters annually.

By increasing the number of cases heard in Gresham, we maximize efficiency for both our downtown and east county courthouses. This improves service and convenience for Multnomah County residents, especially our east county residents, and takes some of the pressure off of our highly utilized downtown courthouse. We urge your support for SB 188 A.

Thank you for your time.

Taylor Steenblock
Multnomah County Government Relations