

HB 4120 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Judiciary

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Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 2/1, 2/8

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Reduces or waives certain costs for low-income persons, including court fines, fees, and forms of attestation in certain proceedings. Permits waiver or alternative conditions of payment for fines on violations, based on ability to pay. Allows an adult in custody to seek a filing fee waiver with a true copy of a trust account statement instead of a certified copy. Allows a habeas corpus petitioner to use a sworn declaration instead of notarized affidavit to demonstrate inability to pay. Establishes limit of a single filing fee for petitions requesting multiple fiduciaries or protective orders in protective proceedings. Eliminates additional fees for an amended affidavit in small estate probate matters.

Authorizes Chief Justice to direct or permit remote appearances. Allows court to order a hearing be in person upon a party's request, based on a particular need or constitutional right. Removes provisions regarding remote appearances during statewide emergency. Effective Jan. 1, 2023 for all changes relating to court fines, fees, and forms of attestation. Declares emergency, effective upon passage.

FISCAL: Has minimal fiscal impact

REVENUE: Has minimal revenue impact

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Judicial discretion in misdemeanor and felony cases
- Impacts of fines and fees on revenue
- Work as alternative to fine
- In-person and remote court proceedings

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Court fines and fees can impose significant hurdles for low-income persons, and inability to pay fines or appear in court can generate compounding penalties and collateral consequences. A 2018 courts survey in Oregon found that low-income Oregonians with civil court hearings reported problems accessing the courts due to denial of a filing fee waiver, inability to obtain transportation to court, and interference from family or work obligations. The Oregon Judicial Department commenced a Strategic Campaign in 2020 to improve services and outcomes for people who are underserved, vulnerable, or marginalized, and to increase access to the courts for all Oregonians. Its initiatives include reductions of fines and fees for people who are unable to pay them and using technology to provide expanded court access.

House Bill 4120 permits waivers or alternative payment conditions of fines for violations, provides incarcerated persons with lower cost alternatives to show inability to pay court filing fees, limits additional filing fees when requesting multiple fiduciaries or protective orders, prohibits additional fees for filing an amended small estate affidavit, and allows courts to continue using remote proceedings in non-emergency times.