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TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 4121 For the House Committee on Judiciary February 1, 2022

Presented by:

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This testimony is offered in support of House Bill 4121.

How This Bill Changes Current Law

House Bill 4121 authorizes the presiding judge of a judicial district to appoint child support referees who will hear child support and parentage cases receiving child support services under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act, including related contempt of court matters. Modeled on Oregon's successful juvenile court structure, parties would have a further right of de novo review in circuit court of orders adjudicated by child support referees.

By authorizing child support referees dedicated to adjudicating these matters, this legislation will extend the depth of child support services to Oregon's children and families, who will benefit from having their cases considered by child support subject matter experts in integrated child support dockets using a "problem-solving" approach. The structure and approach offer a meaningful expansion of families' access to justice and positive outcomes in an intensely personal matter—the support of their shared children. Integrating child support dockets will also bring efficiency for both the Oregon Judicial Department and the Oregon Child Support Program because it will allow for a more uniform approach in the application of child support guidelines and laws and also expand capacity for other dockets.

This bill is intended to take advantage of the federal funding under Title IV-D, also known as federal financial participation, which offers a 66 percent reimbursement to the Oregon Child Support Program (as the state Title IV-D agency), or a subrecipient (such as the Oregon Judicial Department), for activities that further the mission of the federal and state child support program, which is supporting parents to support their children.

Key Points of Legislation

- Expands families' access to justice through child support adjudicator expertise in a problem-solving court model that leads to positive outcomes for families.
- Strengthens the collaborative work done on child support matters by the Oregon Child Support Program and the Oregon Judicial Department in the application of child support guidelines and laws.
- Creates administrative efficiencies by concentrating the work in integrated child support dockets before child support referees, thus alleviating pressure on other demanding court dockets.
- Takes advantage of the federal Title IV-D funds to help pay for child support services in the court system, aligning with the practice of many other states.

Fiscal Impact

This legislation will not have a discernable fiscal impact on the Oregon Child Support Program.

Fiscal Benefits

The 66 percent federal reimbursement leverages state funds already supporting child support cases in court dockets. Further, this legislation is expected to create administrative efficiencies by concentrating the work in integrated child support and parentage dockets.

Recommended Action

The Oregon Department of Justice and the Oregon Child Support Program recommend approval of House Bill 4121.