



January 16, 2023

Re: Support for Senate Bill 306

Dear Oregon State Legislature Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Leni Tupper, I am former Co-Chair of the Portland Community College (PCC) Paralegal Program, and current Director of the PCC CLEAR Clinic, where we provide free limited-scope legal services, including eviction defense to Portland residents. With the assistance of dedicated paralegals and paralegal students, this year the PCC CLEAR Clinic helped hundreds of people remove legal barriers that are holding our community back from enjoying their full participation. We have also trained countless paralegal students in the practical skills necessary to succeed as legal professionals committed to increasing access to justice.

**I am writing today to share my enthusiastic support for Senate Bill 306, to amend the statutes surrounding the practice of law in Oregon to allow for licensed paralegals to practice law in a limited capacity in the areas of landlord-tenant law and family law.** Below please find just a few of the benefits the CLEAR Clinic has enjoyed by including paralegals in our work, which could be greatly heightened by allowing for these paralegals to be licensed to practice law in a limited capacity.

**Paralegals bring a unique perspective to the practice of law.** I have extensive experience providing free legal services to the public through a legal clinic model that involves attorneys, law students, paralegals, and paralegal students. One of the most striking aspects of this work has been the realization that our paralegals and paralegal students often bring to the table not just a helping hand in the legal case work, but rather a unique perspective and a thoughtful, innovative, and creative approach to solving legal problems. Our paralegal clinic members have

showcased a unique ability to connect with clients, to solve individual legal problems, and to propose and carry out inventive and well thought out large-scale solutions.

**Licensed paralegals will help increase access to justice for our most marginalized communities.** We are undeniably in an access to justice crisis in this country, and more specifically in the state of Oregon.<sup>1</sup> By providing services that are more financially accessible to low-to middle-income Oregonians, paralegals can help us achieve the goal of large-scale access to justice in a matter that is more accessible than relying on lawyers alone. Accessing justice is not always a matter of simply accessing lawyers, “the law,” or the courts. Licensed paralegal-provided legal services have been proven, unlike many other efforts, to make a measurable difference in closing the justice gap.<sup>2</sup> Further, paralegals come from a wider variety of backgrounds and bring a wider variety of perspectives, which allows for non-lawyering viewpoints that are crucial to expanding our understanding of providing access to justice for marginalized communities.

Although attorneys may sometimes be the most highly-trained to deliver legal services in certain situations involving complex legal transactions, the reality is that some of the most life-disrupting day-to-day legal issues are often not the most complex. These are perfectly suited for licensed paralegals to handle on their own in a much more economically feasible manner than attorneys. Further, the licensure requirements for paralegals under this program (hundreds of hours of supervised legal work in the content area where licensure is sought) require more training and experience in the specific subject matter than attorneys are required to obtain to practice law in any field. Conversely, a law student can graduate law school, pass the bar, and hang a shingle as a landlord-tenant attorney, never having completed any education or having done any work in that field whatsoever.

**Licensed paralegals will help diversify the legal profession in Oregon, which in turn helps provide better services to Oregon’s diverse populations.** Paralegal programs are much more cost effective than law school, which means they attract a more diverse pool of students, who can connect with a wider variety of community members. At Portland Community College

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Oregon State Bar Futures Task Force Report, [https://www.osbar.org/\\_docs/resources/taskforces/futures/FuturesTF\\_Reports.pdf](https://www.osbar.org/_docs/resources/taskforces/futures/FuturesTF_Reports.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See generally LAW SOCIETY OF UPPER CANADA, REPORT TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF ONTARIO PURSUANT TO SECTION 63.1 OF THE LAW SOCIETY ACT 26 (2012). See also 50 Rebecca L. Sandefur & Thomas Clarke, *Roles Beyond Lawyers: Summary, Recommendations and Research Report of an Evaluation of the New York City Court Navigators Program and Its Three Pilot Projects*, AM. B. FOUND. RES.J., at 14–22 (2016).

(PCC), for example, our students pay about \$100 per credit hour, for a total of less than \$6,000 for our post-degree paralegal certificate (although most students receive financial aid of some type and actually pay less). Law school, on the other hand, costs an average of \$44,600 per year in tuition and fees, or nearly \$150,000 for a law degree.<sup>3</sup>

Paralegal programs are more diverse than law schools: White, non-Hispanic students made up less than 55% of paralegal graduates in 2017, while law students are about 62% non-Hispanic white.<sup>4</sup> Attorneys have even more dismal diversity statistics, with 80.2% of lawyers, judges, and other judicial workers identifying as non-Hispanic white.<sup>5</sup> The math is clear: more financially accessible licensure options mean that people who have historically been gatekept from joining the legal profession will now be able to do so, and will be able to provide more affordable legal services. And a more diverse legal profession means a better, more accessible, more well-rounded legal profession.

**The return on investment from this bill is immeasurable, because it is a true investment in the potential of our legal community, as well as in providing access to justice to Oregonians.** Please join me in supporting our community by making the investment in accessible, affordable, and innovative legal services through SB 306.

Thank you,



Alena (Leni) A. Tupper, Esquire

[alena.tupper15@pcc.edu](mailto:alena.tupper15@pcc.edu)

(503) 358-2287

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.lawschooltransparency.com/trends/costs/tuition>; see also <https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/loans/student-loans/law-school-costs>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://datausa.io/profile/cip/paralegal#demographics>;  
<https://datausa.io/profile/cip/law#demographics>;

<sup>5</sup> <https://datausa.io/profile/cip/law#demographics>;  
<https://datausa.io/profile/soc/lawyers-judges-magistrates-other-judicial-workers#demographics>.