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**Testimony before Joint Committee of
Ways and Means Subcommittee on
Public Safety in support of
House Bill 5512**

March 9, 2023

Co-Chairs Sollman and Evans, and members of the committee,

My name is Gabe Chase, I am an attorney in Portland and I am appearing today on behalf of the Oregon Campaign for Court Funding, a group of business and nonprofit leaders as well as Oregon State Bar leaders who are concerned about the underfunding of one of the three branches of Oregon's government: the courts.

Oregon's courts have historically struggled to maintain staffing at a level where they can uphold their constitutional duty to administer justice completely and without delay. Even before the pandemic, courts limited their customer service hours. While the number of judges has increased due to the legislature's efforts, and the courts have successfully implemented Oregon eCourt, maintaining the clerks and support staff the courts depend on to make our system function remains critical.

We urge the Legislature to consider the many benefits a healthy and engaged court system provides to Oregonians and provide adequate funding for the Oregon Judicial Department.

Courts offer safety for the public by resolving criminal cases, certainty for businesses and organizations in disputes with customers, competitors and the government, protection for consumers, and resolution to families in crisis. Our constitution and statutes rightly require courts to deal with certain kinds of cases like criminal matters and many juvenile cases before others. Lower priority cases – such as civil disputes – fall to the back and move forward only as permitted by resolution of the cases at the front of the line. As Oregon's courts move forward and address the backlog of cases that grew during COVID, our system has experienced additional challenges to provide court services to those in need.

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The Oregon Campaign for Court Funding is committed to engaging with the legislature and the governor in a conversation about the budget for our court system. We hope for a constructive dialog. We realize that all parts of our state government have to pull together to support healthcare, transportation, public safety, and education, but we are convinced that adequate funding for our court system is a critically important part of our budget that must not be forgotten. We look forward to talking with you soon about these important issues.

Sincerely,

Gabe Chase
Public Affairs Committee Chair, Oregon State Bar Board of
Governors