

Carolyn R. Smale  
808 Cascade Ave.  
Hood River, OR 97031

March 9, 2023

Dear Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony and I understand this will be placed in the official record.

I have been practicing consumer bankruptcy law in the Columbia River Gorge for over 25 years. I enjoy the work and helping people navigate through their financial difficulties. I had been looking for something new to supplement my practice and began looking into mediation. I found Six Rivers Dispute Resolution Center and I am working part time through June as Six River's first ever Mediation Apprentice. I always knew about Six Rivers; I walked by it every day. However, until getting involved with Six Rivers I had no idea how **important** the services are that **Six Rivers** provides to our Gorge Community.

*This is why I am writing to you today and asking you (as an attorney I would tell you but as a mediator, I ask) to support SB600, which increases critical funding for Six Rivers Dispute Resolution Center. Six Rivers provides mediation and training for our communities in Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam and Wheeler counties. We also cover Klickitat and Skamania counties in Washington.*

Six Rivers core work is to help community members navigate conflict in an **affordable and assessable** way. Six Rivers receives critical funding, in part, through the Oregon Office of Community Dispute Resolution, located within the University of Oregon Law School. Despite doubly increased caseloads, priority requests from schools and community partners, this flat base funding has not increased to meet the need.

Please support SB 600, to ensure that Six Rivers is sustainably funded to address the needs of our community members. We help people resolve disputes faster and in a dignified and civil manner. We are considerably less expensive than going to court and in this way we provide **access to justice** to folks that would not otherwise have a forum to resolve their differences. Six Rivers Landlord Tenant services **helps keep people housed** and off the streets. Six Rivers teaches people how to **constructively resolve problems** with one another, contributing to **healthier, safer, and more peaceful communities**.

**This funding is critical** for Six Rivers to continue to provide the core mediation and training services that they do.

Mediation is a growing field and in today's polarized world, Six River's services are more important than ever. We add civility to problem solving and help our clients and the community work together to come to peaceful resolutions. Countless studies have shown that a mediated agreement, created by the parties, is followed better and is more effective than a court decision.

Six Rivers offers an efficient, affordable, and pragmatic way to solve problems.

Please support SB600 to sustainably fund the vital community work we provide.

Sincerely,

/s/ Carolyn R. Smale

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