



Joint Ways & Means Committee
Hearing on SB 5506
Testimony of Wayne Belmont
April 14, 2023

Co-Chairs Steiner, Sanchez, and members of the Committee, my name is Wayne Belmont. I live in Lincoln County in the Newport area. I recently retired as county counsel for Lincoln County after 35 years of service. I am currently the President of the Board of Directors of the Oregon Law Center and a Board member of Legal Aid Services of Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of SB 5506. I ask for your support for funding for the statewide legal aid system and for the Oregon Judicial Department.

Legal aid's mission is to achieve justice for the low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. The three Oregon legal aid organizations, Oregon Law Center, Legal Aid Services of Oregon, and Center for Nonprofit Legal Services in Jackson County, work cooperatively to provide free civil legal assistance to low-income clients across the state. We have offices in 18 communities, and we serve clients in all 36 Oregon counties. Our programs are strategic, effective, and efficient. We prioritize legal issues that protect people's livelihoods, health and safety, and family stability.

In 2021, legal aid served over 15,500 low-income individuals directly, 200,000 Oregonians through impact litigation, and hundreds of thousands of Oregonians through administrative advocacy. 76% of legal aid's clients were women in 2021, reflecting a focus on serving survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Legal aid stretches its limited resources by providing self-help materials and through pro bono attorney volunteer programs.

The Newport office of Legal Aid Services of Oregon helps many low-income Oregonians with their legal needs in the areas of housing, domestic violence and family law, and public benefits. Legal aid plays an important role in Lincoln County. It helps our judicial system run more smoothly and provides critical help that is not available anywhere else, especially in a rural area. The legal aid office in Newport was able to add an attorney thanks to one-time funding for the Eviction Defense Project. As a result of this funding, there has been more help for low-income people in Lincoln County to stay in their homes and avoid homelessness.

I have served as a board member of LASO and OLC for over twenty years because I

believe so strongly in the mission of legal aid and the importance of legal aid's work not just in my community, but across the state of Oregon. The Oregon Judicial Department needs resources to provide an efficient, trauma-informed, responsive, and accessible civil justice system. Legal aid is a key partner in this effort. We all depend on support from the Oregon Legislature to achieve this mission. I ask on behalf of legal aid and the Oregon Judicial Department for your support. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.