

OREGON TRIAL LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

812 SW Washington Street, #900

Portland, OR 97205

www.oregontriallawyers.org

503-799-1017

Testimony of Arthur Towers

OTLA Political Director

In Support of SB 233

Before the Senate Committee on Rules

April 27, 2023

Chair Lieber, Vice-Chair Knopp, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 233.

Access to justice depends on a robust bench. We need a talented, diverse, experienced judiciary to make sure that Oregonians from diverse backgrounds get the fair treatment they deserve. Oregonians who use the court system are often experiencing one of the worst events of their life (an arrest, victimization from a crime, a severe injury or death of a loved one, eviction, a divorce). A high-quality judiciary is critical for people who are reliant on judges to find a fair outcome to their crisis.

Salaries of judges in Oregon lag behind those in neighboring states, in fact they lag those in every state.

Ideally, judicial salaries would be attractive enough for mid-career attorneys (from either the public sector or the private sector) who are entering their prime earning years to seek appointment. We want attorneys with meaningful trial experience to join the bench. And we want to keep them – losing experienced judges for financial reasons is a tremendous drain on the system.

We recognize that budgets are tight, and we are sensitive about the variety of needs in the judicial system, much less the rest of state government. But the legislature should consider prioritizing that those who need the court system get the most skilled, most even-handed treatment possible.

We urge your support for SB 233.