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April 28, 2023

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Four Rivers Cultural Center - Ontario, Oregon

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, and members of the committee:

My name is Tim Helfrich. I am a lawyer here in Ontario. I am writing today to advocate for adequate funding for the courts, for low-income legal services and for indigent defense – The Oregon State Bar’s three key budget priorities.

Fully funded and operating courts are critical to protecting the rights of businesses and individuals alike. We learned this the hard way in 2020 and 2021. 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. Three funding priorities within the OJD budget are worth mentioning:

- First, maintaining current service level funding for the court system will allow the courts to continue to provide timely services to the public and reduce impacts to public defense and public safety.
- Second, continuing to implement a statewide pretrial release program that will decrease Oregon’s reliance on cash bail, and allow release decisions to be made based on case specific risk assessments.
- Finally, improving and expanding opportunities to use remote hearings, which enables more Oregonians to access the justice system.

In addition to maintaining a healthy court system, the Oregon State Bar is very concerned about ensuring that Oregonians are able to access the legal assistance they need. For example, about 78% of domestic relations cases have at least one party who is not represented by an attorney. In over half the cases, both sides are unrepresented.

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Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Four Rivers Cultural Center - Ontario, Oregon
April 28, 2023
Page 2

Throughout the civil legal system, large numbers of court users are unrepresented, meaning judges and court staff often have to spend additional time on each case.

This is the key reason the Oregon State Bar continues to advocate for funding for Oregon's low-income legal service providers. Oregon's Legal Aid providers are able to serve clients in all 36 Oregon counties thanks to the support of the legislature, and I urge you to continue that support this session.

Finally, I ask that you support adequate funding for indigent defense services in criminal cases – a crucial part of the public safety system. This means ensuring sufficient funding to enable public defenders to continue to ably represent all eligible clients, and supporting fair compensation for publicly funded attorneys in both the adult criminal and juvenile justice systems.

Thank you again for holding this hearing here today, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

YTURRI ROSE LLP



Tim J. Helfrich