

Circuit Court of the State of Oregon for Jackson County



Jackson County Justice Building – 100 S. Oakdale, Medford, OR 97501
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Benjamin M. Bloom, Judge

February 2, 2024

The Honorable Floyd Prozanski, Chair
Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee

Re Senate Bill 1541

Dear Chair Prozanski and Committee Members:

As the Presiding Judge of the Jackson County Circuit Court, I am submitting this letter in support of the Oregon Judicial Department's request for new judicial positions contained in Senate Bill 1541. Over the course of my more than thirteen-year judicial career, my guiding principles have been adherence to the rule of law and access to justice. Because of the size of the court's caseload, Jackson County Circuit Court's significant lack of judicial resources substantially impairs access to justice for many people in our community and state.

By standard measures, Jackson County is woefully understaffed when it comes to the number of judges needed to adequately process the court's cases. Under the current Oregon Judicial Department workload study, Jackson County needs six judicial positions – the most of any judicial district in the state. Even adding one judge will help with the management of crowded criminal, juvenile, and family law dockets.

As I mentioned in support of SB 235 last year, our court runs three main dockets every day. Our criminal docket is overflowing, despite reductions in our pending criminal cases. Jackson County is one of the epicenters of the public defense crisis. We have the largest number of unrepresented persons in the entire state – 822 as of Friday, February 2, including 57 in custody. The criminal docket also includes a very large – and growing -- number of aid and assist cases, and these cases continue to grow. The aid and assist docket requires significant judicial resources on a regular basis to help monitor individual criminal defendants' conditions in limited local facilities, the county jail, and less frequently, the Oregon State Hospital.

Additionally, we have two judges who oversee a mental health treatment court and an adult drug court for repeat property offenders. Both courts treatment courts are time consuming but provide better outcomes for the participants and save the state significant funds by keeping individuals out of the Oregon correctional facilities.

Our court is also extremely busy processing child custody, domestic relations, and civil cases. In addition to these cases, the civil case load includes landlord-tenant cases and protective proceedings, such as stalking orders, family abuse restraining orders, elder abuse restraining orders, sexual abuse restraining orders, and extreme risk protective orders. All of these cases involve some of the most vulnerable individuals at risk of harm in our community.

The same statement can be made about our juvenile and probate dockets. Both of these dockets would greatly benefit from the presence of an additional judge, particularly our juvenile court which continues to have one of the largest judicial court caseloads in the state.

Unfortunately, the Jackson County Circuit Court simply does not have sufficient judicial officers to hear all of these matters as promptly as we should. We are behind in our time-to-disposition goals in probate, felony, and misdemeanor cases. More cases are being filed than we can decide in a year in probate, juvenile delinquency, misdemeanor, and civil cases. These are some of the measures we use to monitor our ability to deliver timely decisions to litigants.

The real impact on the lack of judges is the consequences for residents, including our most vulnerable community members who deserve timely resolution of their legal issues. The addition of one judge in Jackson County will not completely fix the constraints on judicial demand. But even one additional judicial officer will improve the situation our court faces by making more hearings in juvenile, criminal, civil, and domestic matters possible in a timely manner. I urge you to support Senate Bill 1541. Thank you for your time in considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Benjamin M. Bloom", written over a horizontal line.

BENJAMIN M. BLOOM
Presiding Judge