



February 6, 2024

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee:

The Washington County Chamber of Commerce expresses its sincere and urgent request for your support in securing critical funding for Washington County's Courthouse Replacement Project and the addition of a new judicial officer.

As the largest business organization in Washington County, we have witnessed the challenges that our County's justice system faces on a daily basis. They are currently grappling with oversized caseloads that have placed immense pressure on the dedicated Judges, making it increasingly difficult for them to provide timely and fair justice to our community members.

In the short-term, the allocation of \$886,528 in permanent funding for a new judicial officer would provide much-needed relief to our overburdened judicial system. This immediate intervention will help alleviate the strain on our judges and ensure that justice is served efficiently and effectively.

However, we must also look to the long-term future of Washington County's justice system. With the second-largest population in the state, our county's severe shortage of courtroom space and personnel significantly delays access to justice for thousands of people. The Oregon Judicial Department's analysis has revealed that in Washington County, we require not just one additional judge but four in total to meet our current needs adequately. While our County has identified a space that can be repurposed to accommodate one additional judge, our existing court facilities simply cannot accommodate the necessary expansion for all four judges.

Our current facilities are crowded to the point where victims, defendants, and attorneys are often forced to conduct discussions in hallways due to the lack of private meeting spaces. This situation is particularly concerning for those who have experienced trauma related to their cases, as they are forced into close proximity with the individuals involved in their trauma, potentially causing further harm as well as the need for client confidentiality which is a core constitutional right.

Furthermore, the safety of our community members is at risk due to the seismic vulnerability of our courthouse and the attached Justice Services Building. In the event of a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake, these buildings are at risk of severe structural damage, posing a serious threat to the lives of those within them. This risk extends to members of the public, potential jurors, victims, clients, and attorneys who are in the vicinity during regular business hours.

The Washington County Chamber is deeply concerned about the implications of these challenges on the safety and well-being of our community members. Therefore, we implore you to support the request for \$1.25 million in one-time matching state funds for the Washington County Courthouse Replacement Project.

Your assistance in securing funding for both a new judicial officer and the courthouse project is essential to ensure the continued delivery of justice and the safety of our community members. We sincerely hope you will consider our urgent appeal and work towards addressing these critical issues.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. Your support will have a real impact on the quality of life for Washington County residents. Please feel free to reach out to me at 503/473-4486 or [deannap@wcchamber.org](mailto:deannap@wcchamber.org) if you require any further information or clarification.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deanna Palm". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "D" and a stylized "P" for "Palm".

Deanna Palm  
President/CEO