

County Court

221 S. Oregon St. PO Box 427 Condon, OR 97823
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February 14, 2024

Chair Prozanski
Vice Chair Thatcher
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, Oregon

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on Monday, February 12th regarding my support for SB 1576 and the -4 amendment.

As you know, the proposed amendment provides local decision-making authority over probate jurisdiction to the County Courts of Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Sherman and Wheeler Counties. It accomplishes this by adopting language similar to existing juvenile jurisdiction statutes, which provide County Courts a choice over whether to retain or transfer their jurisdiction to Circuit Court.

I want to emphasize this point.

The amendment does not require County Courts to give up their probate jurisdiction nor alter their government structure.

Several members of the public have submitted testimony concerned that this amendment alone will abolish the County Judge position and alter the existing County Court structure in Gilliam County. This is simply untrue.

The proposed amendment alters ORS 111.055 and 111.115 concerning probate jurisdiction. The process for abolishing the County Judge position and establishing a Board of County Commissioners is found in ORS 203.230. This statute, as well as County Home Rule Statutes, already allow electors to determine their local government structure and are **left unchanged** by the -4 amendment.

Transfer of the juvenile and/or probate jurisdiction do not alter the fundamental form of the County Court system. In fact, the Crook County Court has had **no judicial jurisdiction** for decades, but has retained a County Judge and County Court system.

Members of the Gilliam County Court have already indicated, in a public meeting conducted on January 3, 2024, that they are interested in referring the larger question of our County's government structure to the voters through the Charter process contained in County Home Rule Statutes. But, in order to provide the proposed Charter Committee and, by extension, Gilliam County electors, with a full slate of options, the Gilliam County Court must have the authority to transfer its probate jurisdiction. The -4 amendment clears up an existing dispute over whether County Courts have that authority.

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Several objections were raised over the Emergency Clause contained in the -4 amendment. I support Reps. Owens and Smith's request to remove the emergency clause.

Finally, I support the request from the Oregon Judicial Department to add a 90-day notice to the Circuit Court of an impending jurisdictional transfer. This change will enable both the County Judge and Circuit Court sufficient time to coordinate and ensure a smooth jurisdictional transfer of current and future cases.

Again, I urge you to support SB 1576 and the -4 amendment with the two changes I've noted above. Thank you for your consideration and work on behalf of the People of Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Farrar Campbell". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Elizabeth A. Farrar Campbell
County Judge