



February 5, 2024

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

As the Executive Director of the Family Justice Center for Washington County, I am respectfully requesting your support for \$886,528 in permanent funding for a new judicial officer, and \$1.25 million in one-time matching state funds for Washington County's Courthouse Replacement Project. Short-term, an additional judicial officer would provide relief to our judges who are struggling to keep up with oversized caseloads; long-term, we will need more courtrooms to expand our judicial workforce to meet the needs of our community members. Funding for a new judge, and our Courthouse project, will help provide badly needed relief to Washington County's justice system.

In my time at the Family Justice Center, I have seen how hard our court and judicial staff work to provide equal justice to all who come before them and provide support to those with challenges to access. I have seen first-hand how much the court wants to support the community and have also seen the negative toll it takes that they cannot. The lack of judges has been problematic as vulnerable, traumatized victims must be subpoenaed multiple times for trial due to resets due to lack of judges to assign cases. Victims become less participatory over time as they become even more frustrated with the court system. Additionally, due to severe capacity constraints, victims cannot access the time and attention they need to fully participate in the process, nor can judges spend the time it takes to fully understand the incredible nuances of a case. The Family Justice Center hosts a court inside, and in a one-hour timeframe, we can put 6 or 8 people in front of the judge, giving them only 5-10 minutes to state their case and receive a ruling. This is bad not just for victims, but also for judges. When I have asked them, judges would prefer at least one hour per case, leaving all of Washington County with a lack of access to justice and can only be fixed by additional justices and the space to accommodate them.

As the county with the second largest population in the state, our severe lack of courtroom space and personnel has an outsized impact by delaying access to justice for thousands of people. The Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) has analyzed the number of case filings for each case type in our county, and they determined that we need four additional judges to be able to meet our current needs. The county has identified a space they can use if the state grants one additional judge, but they unfortunately do not have enough space in our court facilities for four more judges. With the addition of these judges and space, the Washington County Circuit Court will not only be able meet its mandated responsibilities but will provide victims with the trauma-informed access to justice they deserve, with the time and support they need to make their case.

Please consider Washington County's request for one new judicial officer and the one-time matching fund for the courthouse replacement project.

Respectfully,
Rachel Schutz, Executive Director
Family Justice Center of Washington County