

Re: In support of SB 1541

Date: February 5, 2024

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez,

As a resident of Washington County, and a member of our local Public Safety Coordinating Commission, I am respectfully requesting your support for SB 1541, specifically the request for \$886,528 in permanent funding for a new judicial officer and two support staff members for Washington County. The most recent Staff and Judge Workloads Assessment from the National Center for State Courts showed that Washington County has 23% less judicial staff than needed based on their analysis of the case filings. These positions will help provide relief to our judges who are struggling to keep up with their unrealistic caseloads.

The public safety ecosystem is very complex with many interrelationships among the Courts (Judges, staff, Defense attorneys), the District Attorney's and Sheriff's Offices, and more. When one resource is underfunded, it can greatly impact the others and negatively affect the overall safety for all residents. The judicial shortage means that cases often take longer to be heard and fully resolved. This results in more people waiting for their trial in an already overcrowded jail, not getting timely access to mental health facilities, or being released on bail for a longer period. An overcrowded jail results in forced releases, which is a safety threat for all residents. Taking longer to resolve a case puts a heavy burden on victims who are seeking safety and security. In addition, there is less time for the hearings themselves and less time that can be allotted to the cases overall compared to other counties. This puts additional stress on the DA and Defense attorneys to ensure comprehensive and thorough trials with just outcomes for all.

As the county with the second largest population in the state, our severe lack of courtroom personnel has a huge impact by delaying access to justice for thousands of people, which effects the ability to keep the residents of Washington county safe. While one new judicial position will not fully resolve these issues, it is critical to providing some relief to our incredibly strained judicial workforce. We cannot ignore the fragility of the public safety ecosystem and its impact on the safety for all Washington county residents.

As a resident of Washington County and a member of the local PSCC, I would greatly appreciate your assistance in securing state funding to expand Washington county's judicial capacity with an additional judgeship and support staff.

Best regards,

Melissa Laird  
Beaverton, Oregon