

Date:	February 3rd, 2025
To:	Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee
From:	Association of Oregon Counties Legislative Affairs Manager, Tim Dooley
Subject:	Support – SB 97

Good afternoon, Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Tim Dooley, and I am a Legislative Affairs Manager for the Association of Oregon Counties. The Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) is a non-partisan member organization that advocates on issues that unite all county governing bodies and have an impact on county functions, governance, budgets, and services.

I am here today to support the Oregon Judicial Department on Senate Bill 97. This bill enables counties to make investments in conciliation and mediation services. Section 2 allows counties to raise the fee cap on marriage licenses or domestic partnerships that is allocated to conciliation and mediation from \$10 to \$50.

While at first blush, it seems like a substantial increase, this \$10 fee was first introduced in statute in 1977 and has not changed since then. Indexed to inflation, this fee would be slightly more than \$50 today. This bill also sets that the fee maximum will be allowed to adjust upward by the Consumer Price Index, so that counties will continue to be able to fund these services going forward without having to come back to the Legislature again to ask for the cap to be raised.

As you can imagine, the cost of providing services over the last 48 years has far outstripped the ability of counties to fund these services through this fee, so all of, or a substantial portion of costs in many counties are borne by the participants, which can be over \$100-200 per session. Mediation is an important tool to allow families to resolve disputes in a setting with a trained facilitator rather than having to go through a formal hearing. Only about half of family law cases with children are served through mediation due to limited access.

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Because these services are coordinated by the individual counties, the judicial department also does not have a comprehensive picture of the funding needs and expenditures of each county. Section 1 sets up a reporting mechanism for county treasurers and presiding judges to give the state court administrator information on expenditures and fund balances.

Counties appreciate the flexibility in this bill to determine the appropriate funding level in their communities, up to the statutory maximum. Thank you for your time.

Best,

Tim Dooley
Legislative Affairs Manager for Public Safety