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Daina A. Vitolins
Circuit Court Judge

Annette C. Hillman
Presiding Judge

Wade L. Whiting
Circuit Court Judge

Twenty-Second Judicial District

February 24, 2025

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

I am writing to you as the Presiding Judge for the 22nd Judicial District made up of Jefferson and Crook Counties in support of SB 95. That bill would add one judicial position to the three judges we currently have rotating through courthouses in two counties. We are requesting your support for that additional judicial position.

We were fortunate to have legislative and county support to replace both courthouses in the district -- Jefferson County in 2017 and Crook County in 2024 -- and we have the space available to accommodate a fourth judge and supporting staff. The population growth and legislative changes have put a strain on my judicial colleagues with the lack of available time to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

The lack of available judicial resources means parties often are delayed 90 days to obtain a simple settlement conference or schedule a motion hearing. We are only able to meet our time to jurisdiction standard in juvenile dependency cases in 38.3% of cases and our data dashboards show we are untimely in other areas as well, with 28% of juvenile delinquency cases beyond the timeliness standard and estate cases 53% untimely. Further, we are unable to meet our statutory timelines on protective orders and often criminal cases due to lack of judicial resources. Our dashboard reflects that we are 100% untimely on adult protective proceedings in Jefferson County of active pending cases and that is unacceptable. We desperately need your help in meeting the needs of our community.

For the last 14 years that I have been a judge, we were fortunate to have a highly skilled retired lawyer, former assistant attorney general Peter Shepherd, volunteer to act as a pro tem judge four judicial days a month until he completely retired from practice. This has greatly impacted our court, shifting the small claims, landlord-tenant, traffic trials and protective orders that he handled back to the three sitting judges. That in turn impacts everyone else waiting to have their case resolved timely. The rise in civil case filings, violations, probate, and domestic relations also has had an impact. We are struggling to meet best-practice timelines to case resolution. It is unfair to those who seek justice and unfair to the judges rushing through cases at the expense of one of the most important tenets of justice and a requirement of the Oregon Constitution -- to administer justice "completely and without delay."

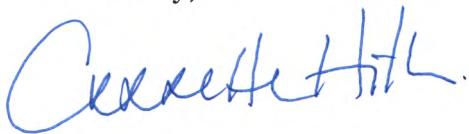


Aid-and-Assist cases and civil commitment hearings greatly impact our dockets, resulting in bumping and delaying other matters. I recently found myself having to bump a settlement conference scheduled with an in-custody offender charged with murder to conduct a civil commitment hearing that has a short five-day statutory timeline. That meant that the attorneys, victim's family, and everyone who had prepared for a settlement conference on a murder case would be required to wait another 30-60 days to reschedule. Even then, I was advising the attorneys during the civil commitment hearing to be mindful of the time allotted for the hearing. These are unacceptable tradeoffs but are the struggles we are faced with weekly.

We offer a drug court (Recovery Court) and a mental health court (Wellness Court) in both Jefferson and Crook Counties, and we want to continue to offer treatment courts to meet the needs of our community. However, specialty courts are in jeopardy due to lack of judicial resources and coverage. As it is, we are not meeting the recommended number of court dates for these treatment courts, placing our grant funding in jeopardy.

When my colleagues and I meet at 7 a.m. for a judge's meeting, so we don't lose docketing time, and I see my colleagues working until 7 to 9 p.m. just to prepare for court, it negatively impacts even the best and most patient judge. However, the impact is far greater on those who wait just to see a judge to resolve their case. Please join me in supporting SB95 and another judicial position for the 22nd Judicial District.

Sincerely,



Annette C. Hillman
Presiding Judge
22nd Judicial District