



FIFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

CLACKAMAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE
807 MAIN STREET
OREGON CITY, OREGON 97045

February 24, 2025

The Honorable Floyd Prozanski, Chair
The Honorable Kim Thatcher, Vice-Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Seeking Another Judge for the Clackamas County Circuit Court

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

We respectfully request funding for one judge position for the Clackamas County Circuit Court. Our circuit currently has too few judges to meet our community's needs. This situation creates delay, inconvenience, and frustration for court users and the community. Our court did not seek additional judges for a long time because we had nowhere to put them. Thanks to the Oregon Legislature, we will soon move to a larger, safer courthouse that can accommodate more judges. We now seek to add these long-needed positions so we can improve delivery of justice in Clackamas County.

In the last two years, there has been a significant increase in new case filings in the Clackamas County Circuit Court. From 2023–2024, we have seen a particularly sharp increase in civil cases and protective order petitions.¹ Unfortunately, our backlog of cases has grown. Our court is not meeting many of our time-to-disposition standards, particularly with respect to misdemeanor and felony cases.

The Judicial Department's judicial workload study indicates our court needs at least four additional judges, even with a new position starting in July. According to the study, our court has the third highest unmet need for judge positions in Oregon.

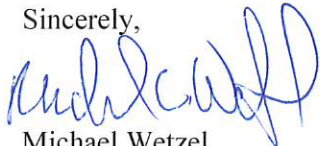
We have taken dramatic steps to maximize the time our judges spend directly handling cases, but even with those steps, we still need more judicial resources. We regularly double-book and triple-book trials so that if one case resolves in a plea, we can use the judicial time to handle a different case. If all cases are proceeding to trial, however, the surplus case or cases are set over to a future date. That means some court participants, family members, and crime victims will have taken time off from work, arranged childcare, and come to court only to learn their case has been set for a later trial day. Family law cases are also double-booked, which can support judicial efficiency while taking a toll on court participants. Faced with delays, witnesses sometimes depart before they can testify, parents can get so frazzled they struggle to provide information, and some abuse victims must wait a long time near their perpetrators for the case to start.

¹ Specific data is available from the Oregon Judicial Department.

As judges handle crowded dockets, court participants can feel rushed and unheard. People who require extra time may not receive it. Many court participants are distressed and confused, need interpretation help, or face mental health challenges. It is important that judges, when working with those individuals, have the time to slow down and make sure court participants understand what is happening. With too few judges, that may not happen.

Our court is doing everything we can to help people have their day in court. Even with the steps we have taken to maximize judges' in-court time, we need additional judges to serve our community well. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please let us know if you have any questions.

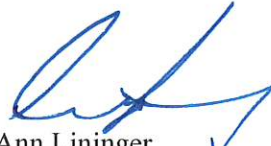
Sincerely,



Michael Wetzel
Presiding Judge



Debbie Spradley
Trial Court Administrator



Ann Lininger
Circuit Court Judge