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**Testimony in Support of HB 5012  
Oregon Judicial Department Budget  
February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Dear Co-Chair Broadman, Co-Chair Evans, and Members of the Joint Subcommittee on Public Safety:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 5012, the Oregon Judicial Department budget. In particular, I write to support the following specific policy option packages before the committee:

- POP 101 (courthouse safety)
- POP 103 (protective order and family law facilitation)
- POP 104 (eviction customer service)
- POP 129 (domestic relations mediation)

OLC is a non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. OLC is one of the statewide legal aid programs providing services in all 36 counties through offices located in 18 different communities. The two most frequent requests for help from our offices are in the area of family law, or in matters regarding housing stability and eviction. Often, our clients are struggling to escape domestic or sexual violence. Helping our clients maintain safety from abuse, and stable housing for their families, is a critical focus of our work. Full funding for the POPs mentioned above is necessary to ensure that our clients achieve access to justice in family law and housing matters.

- **POP 101 (courthouse safety)**

Victims of abuse who must access the court in order to seek protective orders or safe custody and parenting time orders, or to participate in criminal proceedings, are sometimes followed by their alleged abusers. These incidents can create great danger to victims and their children, and also increase risk for court staff. When buildings are not secured, and individuals are not screened for weapons prior to entry into the building, the consequences could be deadly. POP 101 will enhance safety protocols at courthouses, removing a barrier to justice for victims seeking court assistance.

- **POP 103 (protective order and family law facilitation)**

Some of the most important and impactful services OJD provides, and some of the services most sought by the public, are those provided by the protective order and family court facilitators. It is estimated that in over 86% of all domestic relations cases (family law and restraining order matters), at least one of the parties is self-represented. In 50% of the cases, both sides are self-represented. A legal matter is often an intimidating and frustrating process, and litigants who are engaging the legal system are rarely at their best. Often, litigants are overwhelmed by their personal, often traumatic situations and are not able to understand or undertake drafting of complex legal documents. Facilitators and court staff guide litigants through a very complex system, and often when the litigants are in a very difficult, often dangerous, situation. Facilitators and court clerks may be the

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first people with whom a domestic or sexual violence survivor comes into contact. These interactions can be the first opportunity for a survivor to form an opinion on whether they can trust the legal system to provide them safety from an abusive situation. POP 103 will ensure access to facilitation services for people seeking help with filing, or responding to, complex court paperwork, and will increase access to justice especially for low-income Oregonians.

- **POP 129 (domestic relations mediation)**

ORS 107.755 requires each judicial district to provide mediation in any case in which child custody, parenting time, and visitation are in dispute. However, current service levels do not meet the need. In 2023, only 43 percent of cases with minor children were able to access mediation. Access to mediation services helps to reduce conflict in separation, custody, and parenting time proceedings, and helps parents to arrive at more successful outcomes for their children. Without access to mediation, children will have longer exposure to ongoing co-parenting conflict, increasing the likelihood of adverse childhood experiences and the ongoing costs of litigation for families. POP 129 will ensure funding to better meet this need.

- **POP 104 (eviction customer service)**

Oregon's affordable housing crisis continues to threaten low and moderate-income households, and renters in Oregon are now the 6<sup>th</sup> most cost burdened state in the nation. There were more than 27,000 eviction filings in 2024. As a result, courts are struggling to keep up with increasing filings while providing the level of customer service and support needed for these high-stakes, fast paced cases. Based on this year's current filing rates, OJD anticipates a 22 percent increase from 2023 and almost a 50 percent increase from 2019. The volume of cases, combined with the percentage of self-represented litigants, limits court capacity to provide the help needed. This POP will ensure funding for court facilitators to help self-represented people with forms, provide information about the law and court procedures, and connect people to community services.

In closing, OLC urges support for the OJD budget and for the above-mentioned Policy Option Packages, to increase meaningful access to justice for all Oregonians. These policy option packages will improve many aspects of the legal system for the most vulnerable litigants.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify.