

Date:	February 27th, 2025
To:	Co-Chairs Broadman and Evans, and Members of the Public Safety Subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Ways & Means
From:	Association of Oregon Counties Legislative Affairs Manager, Justin Low
Subject:	Support – SB 5012, POPs 101, 118, 119, 120, and 129

Dear Co-Chairs Broadman and Evans, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Justin Low, and I am a Legislative Affairs Manager for the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC). Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 5012—specifically, POPs 101, 118, 119, 120, and 129—on behalf of AOC.

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. The service relevant to my testimony today involves close collaboration with the Oregon Judicial Department, with whom Oregon counties partner with to provide security, courtrooms, and office space for the state’s Circuit Court system.

While counties shoulder much of the costs of providing offices for the state Circuit Court system, the state makes several important investments to assist with maintenance, security, and capital construction for both state circuit courts and county courthouses. These investments take the form of passthrough funding, contained in OJD’s biennial budget bill – the bill you are considering today. This passthrough funding covers things like court security, conciliation/mediation, and law libraries, all of which are critical to ensure the justice system can function. In addition to pass-through funding, the OJD budget typically contains bonds to help counties replace courthouses. Counties are required to provide matching funds, but these state investments are extremely important, because even well-resourced counties would face incredible hardship trying to replace a courthouse without these state matching funds.

Funding needs for courthouse improvements and replacements typically far outweigh the amount of state funds available each biennium. In a wonderful example of the state-county partnership at its best, AOC and OJD work together each biennium to facilitate a prioritization process to determine which county projects should be first in line to receive available funding. POP 120 reflects OJD’s request for bonding funds to provide the state match for the courthouse replacement projects that rose to the top of the priority list via our collaborative process. POP 118 and 119 would provide state funding for the courthouse planning needs and improvement needs, respectively, that

rose to the top of the priority list via our collaborative process. AOC supports these POPs and hopes very much that these funding requests can be included in OJD's budget this session.

There are two other POPs I'd like to mention AOC's support for. The first is POP 101, which would provide funds for court security improvements for the 8 counties selected for this pilot project. These counties can implement security screening without significant remodeling costs, have full support of the county sheriff, and do not currently have security screening in place. POP 101 will help ensure that judges, staff, and the public are safe while visiting county courthouses.

Lastly, AOC supports POP 129, which is OJD's pass-through domestic relations mediation funding. These dollars support mediation and conciliation services in family law cases where children are involved. Mediation services enable parents to work together to resolve disputes through a trained facilitator. Fewer than half of cases with children involved used mediation, as cost and availability of services are often barriers. Increasing the number of cases that can be resolved through mediation, rather than court hearing, preserves judicial resources and reduces the stress on children through the process of their parent's divorce.

Thank you for taking the time to consider OJD's budget requests, including the POPs, and for your continued efforts to maintain a healthy partnership with counties when it comes to court funding, as well as all the other ways we partner together for the benefit of all Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Justin Low
Legislative Affairs Manager for Governance and Revenue