

Submitter: Thad Higgins  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee  
On Public Safety  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5031

Hello! I am Thad Higgins, a licensed Private Investigator in Oregon. I have a team of four PI's. We work primarily criminal defense cases mostly in Central Oregon, but we have cases in other parts of the state as well. OPDC cases are around 70 percent of our caseload, with the remaining percentage consisting of retained/private clients.

Firstly, Thank you very much for discussing this and have our wage on your radar! I really appreciate it!

Securing the long awaited increase to \$75/hour will make a significant difference in the quality of the PIs I can attract and retain on my team. At the current rates, two of the four members on my team can only work part time, because they must maintain other employment for the predicability of their income and the rate making sense, related to the types of work we do. Our work can be stressful and dangerous. Increasingly, our case load demands that we find and interview subjects in homeless areas. In Central Oregon these areas are often wooded areas with difficult access. Because of these considerations, our team members need self defense training and tools. And vehicles and tires equal to getting out to the witnesses and back. All of these items and training require extra time and money to obtain. Of course as Private Investigators, our training is not paid for, we don't invoice for that. On the other hand, law enforcement works with the same population, but they are provided with 100's of hours a year of training and they drive government vehicles.

In addition, when my team and are are working nights and weekends, there is no overtime paid. Also, we do not accrue vacation/Flex Time or sick time. A hourly rate increase will make all those issues more palatable.

The pay rate for PIs has lagged significantly behind inflation for decades. The increase to \$75 makes sense based on the 1985 rate of \$25/hour when adjusted for inflation and other considerations. I believe the Federal Rate is at \$90/hour, parody with the Fed rate seems like a good goal...

Another consideration I hope is on your radar is the fact that for most of us, we are running a business based on these pay rates. I pay for an office, office supplies, phone accounts, insurances, vehicle expenses, taxes, marketing, administration costs, database subscriptions (TLO, DMV) and other business expenses. So the hourly rate I collect does not all go into my pocket, I have many places the dollars must go before it puts food on the table and for shoes for little Timmy!

While I try to never say "no" when asked to take on cases, if I have to, I will push a OPDC case if a retained case comes in, and we are too busy. Right now, my retained rate is \$115/hour, so from a business standpoint it would be foolish to make half the money.

I understand that part of the discussion is concerning the timing of the implementation of the wage increase. I would strongly encourage and ask that this be accomplished sooner than later! I am hoping to hang onto my current team, training new people is a drag and takes away from my defense work, and no one is paid for that. I will pass along any increase to my team members, and that should help them want to stay. My team members are consistently being recruited by law offices and law enforcement agencies. both of which offer benefits, paid training, and a consistent paycheck. In addition to the above considerations, with the wage increase, I will be able to offer a pay rate that makes sense to some great prospective PI's who simply can not work for what I can reasonably offer based on the current rates. This will allow us to handle more cases, assisting more attorneys. I sincerely implore you to implement this increase by July of 2025.

In closing, I would like to again thank you for considering our wages and for pursuing the goal of securing solid defense teams for every Oregonian!

If you wish to speak to me, my number is 541-480-7950.

Best Wishes,

Thad Higgins