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March 18, 2025

TO: House Committee on the Judiciary
RE: HB 3180

Dear Committee Members and all voting Legislators:

I have been practicing criminal defense in Washington County for over three and a half years, and I am writing to express my fervent support for the Courthouse Replacement Planning Project. I am in the courthouse daily and can say with certainty that the courthouse is woefully undersized, underequipped, and out of date.

The current courthouse is actually made up of two buildings: the Courthouse and the Justice Services Building. These two buildings are connected via an enclosed hallway on the first floor. There are four courtrooms on the fourth floor of the Justice Services Building. Most of the courtrooms are located on the three floors of the Courthouse. This configuration is extremely confusing to litigants and community members, who frequently get lost looking for courtrooms, hearing rooms, the records department, or the Family Law Assistance Program.

The current courthouse has one confidential attorney-client meeting room. It is located on the fourth floor of the Justice Services Building. If I have a hearing on the third floor of the Courthouse, and I want to meet privately with my client, I would have to take them downstairs to the first floor of the Courthouse, down a long hallway to the Justice Services Building, around a corner, down the hallway to the lobby, up to the fourth floor, and then hope that the attorney-client meeting room isn't already occupied. Given how cumbersome that would be, I usually end up having sensitive meetings with my clients in hallways or stairwells.

The courthouse is also out of date with respect to the separation of public and private spaces. This is particularly relevant to me and my practice when I have trials for clients who are being held in custody. The courthouse has no private hallways for transporting in-custody defendants in and out of courtrooms. This is especially problematic for jury trials. It is well-established that jurors seeing a criminal defendant in handcuffs or ankle chains is so prejudicial that it requires a mistrial.

Aside from these logistical problems, the Courthouse is quite simply too small. A study commissioned by the Oregon Judicial Department determined that Washington County would need at least three additional judges with additional support staff to meet current caseloads. That study is nearly ten years old, so the need is likely much greater. The current courthouse is maxed out. There is no more room for all the judges and hearing rooms that are necessary to keep the wheels of justice turning in the second-biggest county in Oregon. This shortage of judges means that litigants in our court receive less time before a judge and their matters take longer to get to resolution than in neighboring counties, negatively impacting

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their access to justice in Washington County. The delays and general lack of accessibility in our courthouse is leading our community members to feel as though our justice system is broken.

Our courthouse is the nexus point for protecting public safety and justice in Washington County. All of the pieces of our justice system, like our Sheriff's office, Community Corrections Agency, Juvenile Services Department, local police agencies and others are diminished when we do not have a well-functioning courthouse. People in Washington County need a well-functioning courthouse to ensure justice.

It is critical that the Legislature appropriate \$1.25 million to Washington County for the Courthouse Replacement Planning Project. Thank you for the work you are doing to enhance public safety and justice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anna Lasher", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Anna Lasher, OSB #153980
Cornerstone Law Group