

Re: In support of HB 3180

Date: March 18, 2025

Dear House Committee on Judiciary,

As a resident of Washington County and a member of our local Public Safety Coordinating Council (PSCC), I am requesting that you support HB 3180, which provides the matching funds needed for the replacement of the Washington County Courthouse.

Our courthouse is the nexus point for protecting public safety and justice in Washington County. Built in 1928, the Washington County Courthouse is so inadequate that there is no room for offices or courtrooms for some of our newest judges and we are desperately in need of more. The lack of courtrooms and shortage of judges means that litigations take longer in our county and litigants receive less time before a judge to adequately plead their case.

There is only one confidential meeting room for attorneys, which makes it challenging for them to discuss confidential legal matters with clients and victims in the courthouse. Victims of violent crime are especially compromised as they are put into a situation where they must be in close quarters with the person who hurt them and discuss their case in a public area, creating anxiety and trauma.

Court backlogs not only affect individuals, but they also erode public trust in the judiciary. Delays can weaken prosecution evidence and increase pressure to accept a plea bargain. In criminal cases, they can slow down justice for victims, lead to overcrowded jails, and allow convicted criminals to remain free while awaiting sentencing. When cases drag on, the public may lose faith in the system's ability to deliver timely and fair justice, fostering cynicism and undermining respect for the law.

All the pieces of our public safety and justice ecosystem, including the Sheriff's office, Community Corrections, Juvenile Services, District Attorney's Office and others are diminished when we do not have a well-functioning courthouse.

I urge you to provide the matching funds for Washington County's courthouse replacement by fully funding HB 3180.

Thank you,  
Melissa Laird  
Washington County