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04/18/2025

From: Stephanie Leffler, Business owner, Human Resources Executive, Mediator, and Community Dispute Resolution Center volunteer

To: Senator Janeen Sollman, Representative Ricki Ruiz, and Co-Chairs of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Senate Bill 5525 – Fully Fund Dispute Resolution

Dear Senator Sollman, Representative Ruiz, and Committee members,

Resolution Oregon's statewide network provides conflict resolution education for youth and adult community members, mediation services, and connects people to local support service providers (e.g., financial resources, legal aid, rehousing & credit counseling). For more than 40 years, these services have shown to help communities improve graduation rates, reduce crime recidivism rates, and resolve disputes faster and cheaper than courts. These preventative services help reduce community costs for incarceration, health care, associated court costs, and keep people housed who are at risk of foreclosure and eviction.

Please help our vulnerable community members by investing in cost-effective mediation services that are complementary to other avenues for justice. Please fully fund Dispute Resolution in the Statewide Programs section of SB 5525.

As a professional mediator and Human Resources Executive with over 30 years of experience in both [volunteer](#) and for-profit work, I write to support the full funding of Oregon's [Community Dispute Resolution Centers](#) (CDRCs). The mediation services provided across Oregon offer numerous benefits, including:

- **Relief to the Court System:** Volunteer mediators in the courts and our communities significantly reduce the burden on an overwhelmed court system, which often lacks sufficient [attorneys](#). We are at a critical level of need.
- **Effective Dispute Resolution:** Mediation provides a positive and effective way to resolve disputes and reduce community divisions.
- **Housing Stability:** Mediation helps stabilize housing and prevent evictions, thereby mitigating downstream costs such as homelessness, juvenile delinquency, and increased medical expenses.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** As a business owner, I know that mediation saves money and expedites the resolution process compared to [litigation](#).



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- **Accessible and Less Intimidating Process:** CDRCs offer a welcoming environment, less intimidating than the formal and stressful judicial process. The trauma of a legal process can exacerbate [stress](#) and negatively impact health.
- **Expert Mediation and Training:** CDRCs provide access to mediation experts and ensure a continuous supply of qualified mediators through free or low-cost training offered by subject matter experts.

In addition to my years of volunteering with [Neighbor to Neighbor](#) in Marion, Linn, and Benton counties, I have resolved employee relations matters and mediated numerous conflicts, including community disputes, small claims, juvenile offender cases, family conflicts, business disputes, real estate issues, divorces, and parenting plans.

Mediation offers substantial social and economic benefits. The bottom line is that CDRCs save money, time, and improve our communities. A cost-benefit analysis would clearly demonstrate the significant savings that mediation services have provided and will continue to provide to taxpayers. Furthermore, the "subjective" or "soft" benefits to our overall community well-being should be a significant consideration.

In summary, without adequate funding and the dedicated work of CDRC directors, staff, and volunteers, Oregon will suffer. It would be a mistake to attempt short-term savings that will ultimately lead to much greater losses. Short-term gain is not sound management of our tax dollars. I urge you to support the broader perspective and back SB 5525.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Leffler