
DATE: February 24, 2020
TO: House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Taylor Steenblock, Multnomah County
RE: SB 1547A, East County Courthouse

Dear Chair Sanchez, Vice Chair Bynum, Vice Chair Sprenger and members of the committee,

My name is Taylor Steenblock. I am writing today to urge your support of SB 1547 as amended. The language in section one specifically would expand Multnomah County's ability to hear cases at the east county courthouse in Gresham. As amended, the court has greater flexibility to schedule proceedings in the East County Courthouse in appropriate cases, while still ensuring that felony traffic cases cannot be heard at the East County Courthouse.

The East County Courthouse (ECC), which is a joint state-county asset, is currently underutilized. There are some days during the week where no cases are scheduled or heard. We intend to address this and maximize the use of the East County Courthouse by removing statutory barriers to hearing more misdemeanors at the ECC.

Under current state statute, if a defendant has been in custody at any point during their case, the case is required to be heard at the downtown courthouse. This bill would allow all misdemeanors occurring east of 122nd to be heard at the East County Courthouse unless the person is currently in custody at the time of a proceeding, has a warrant, or is charged with a felony case. The lack of a holding cell in the ECC is the reason for the latter constraints, but this is not an issue with misdemeanor cases where the person has been released. It is estimated by the the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office that as a result of the changes made in section one of this bill, we could see approximately 2400 additional matters in the ECC for an estimated total of 6700 matters annually.

By increasing the number of cases heard in Gresham, we maximize efficiency for both our downtown and east county courthouses. This improves service and convenience for Multnomah County residents, especially our east county residents, and takes some of the pressure off of our highly utilized downtown courthouse. We urge your support for SB 1547.

Thank you for your time.

Taylor Steenblock
Multnomah County Government Relations