

To: **Members of the House Judiciary Committee**

From: Kevin Campbell,
Oregon Circuit Court Judges Association

Date: March 5th, 2013

Re: **Support for HB 2563**
Modifies annual salaries of justices of Supreme Court and
judges of Court of Appeals, Oregon Tax Court and Circuit Courts.

HB 2563 is designed as a vehicle for increasing judicial compensation based on the recommendation of the Public Official Compensation Commission in their November 2008 final report with an adjustment for CPI (Consumer Price Index). The request to increase compensation for judges is part of Chief Justice Balmer's Oregon Judicial Department budget request for the 2013 Legislative Session as a Policy Option Package (POP).

Background:

In 2007, the Legislature restored and restructured the Oregon Public Compensation Commission (POCC) based on a recommendation from the Public Commission on the Oregon Legislature. The 11 member commission was charged with recommending salary levels for statewide elected leaders, members of the Legislative Assembly and Judges based on a number of criteria including:

- Comparable positions in neighboring states
- The qualifications and skills necessary for each office
- The level of responsibility implicit in each office
- The cost of living
- The total compensation of the positions, including benefits other than salary
- Budget limitations
- Any other factors the Commission may consider to be reasonable, appropriate and in the public interest

According to the POCC report, the approach of the Commission was to use “a conservative approach for setting salary levels that are the median of public official’s salaries in states comparable to Oregon. The Commission’s recommendations reflect its goal of attracting and retaining highly qualified public official in order to provide the best state leadership and governance while maintaining Oregon’s historical commitment to both a citizen legislature and officials committed to public service.”¹

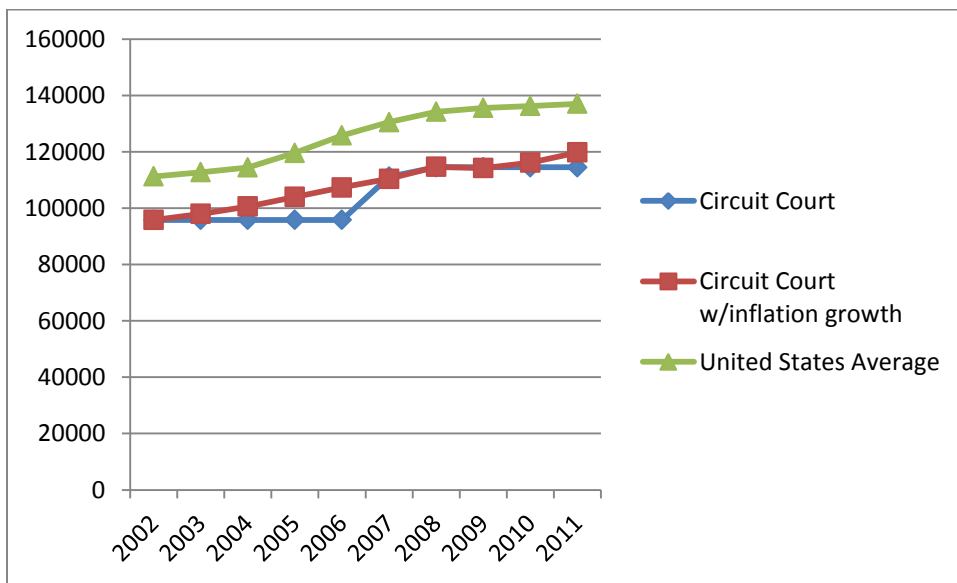
In the 2008 report, The Public Official Compensation Commission recommended an increase of salary for Circuit Court Judges to \$132,000 in keeping with their analysis of comparative states.

Adjusting Judicial Compensation:

Unlike compensation levels for public employees where regularly negotiated contracts address salary and benefit issues over time, the Oregon Legislative Assembly is the sole entity charged with setting and adjusting the salaries of Oregon’s judges.

A Current Evaluation of Judicial Compensation in Oregon:

According to the National Center for State Courts Survey of Judicial Salaries released on July 1st of 2012, Oregon ranks 47th in the nation for Circuit Court Judges salaries when adjusted for cost-of-living. The survey uses Cost of Living indices from the Council for Community and Economic Research, the most widely accepted U.S. source for this information, with nearly 400 reporting jurisdictions from across America.²



¹ Public Officials Compensation Commission, Report and Recommendations, November 2008, Page 12

² National Center for State Courts, Surveys of Judicial Salaries, Vol. 37 No.2, As of July 1, 2012, Page 2

According to the National Center for State Courts Judicial Salary Tracker, Oregon judges experienced a loss of over \$5300 in spending power due to inflation alone in 2012.³

When comparing actual salaries for Circuit Court Judges since 1971 with their equivalent value in 2012 dollars based on the Consumer Price Index, the current salary level of \$114,468 is less in real dollar terms than any time in the past 40 years with the exception of 1985 when the judges salary of \$52,956 was equivalent to \$112,897 in today's dollars.⁴

As a point of comparison, the following is a brief list of similarly situated judge positions from other states and their compensation levels:

Washington:	\$148,832. (+\$34,364)
California:	\$178,789. (+\$64,321)
Alaska:	\$177,888. (+\$63,420)
Nevada:	\$160,000. (+\$45,532)

³ National Center for State Courts, Judicial Salary Tracker

⁴ Circuit Court Salary History, Judge John A. Wittmayer, Multnomah County Courthouse, Page 1