



Commissioner Nick Fish
City of Portland

February 24, 2014

Senator Floyd Prozanski, Chair
Senate Committee on Judiciary
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE, Hearing Room 343
Salem, OR 97301

RE: HB 4143A

Dear Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee:

I write to express my strong and enthusiastic support for HB 4143A, authorizing the courts to direct that unclaimed damages be used to fund Legal Aid.

The concept of using unclaimed class action awards to create an endowment fund for Legal Aid Services is an innovative way to better serve Oregon's most vulnerable families, while ensuring that wrongdoers are held accountable for their actions.

This is not a radical idea: 48 other states have already adopted similar legislation directing unclaimed class action funds to be put to public purpose, and 11 states specifically direct some of that funding to legal aid.

For me, this issue is deeply personal. As a City Commissioner and former practicing lawyer, I am a passionate supporter of Legal Aid Services of Oregon. Equal justice under the law demands that everyone in our community has access to justice. We cannot allow a two-tiered system of laws—one for the wealthy, and one for the rest of us.

My father was a Republican member of Congress from New York. He too served on the Judiciary Committee, and staked out a strong position of support for legal services. At a time when funding for legal services became politicized, he believed

that the issue transcended politics—and instead went to the heart of whether we as a country believed in equal justice under law.

After my father retired from Congress in 1994, President Clinton asked him to serve on the Board of Directors of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). I remember helping him fill out his disclosure forms, and how honored he was to be asked to serve. My father's death in 1996 prevented him from serving on the LSC board.

When I moved to Oregon in 1996, I learned early on about the critically important work of Legal Aid Services of Oregon. I contributed to the Campaign for Equal Justice and joined its Advisory Council. The Campaign raises private funds to support the work of Legal Aid.

Unfortunately, even with the success of the Campaign, only 15 percent of eligible clients in Oregon can be served. That means women who are victims of domestic violence, workers with wage claims, and families facing eviction do not get the representation they need and deserve.

HB 4143A would be a “game changer,” directing tens of millions of dollars into an endowment fund for Legal Aid. It will ensure that thousands of deserving Oregon families receive quality legal services. And it will create a lasting legacy.

I chose public service in part because of my father's example. He believed, as I believe, that we are a better country because of legal services. HB 4143A is an opportunity to advance our shared values of civil rights, equal justice, and basic fairness.

I urge you to support HB 4143A.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Fish". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nick Fish

cc: Representative Jennifer Williamson
Representative Tobias Read
Portland City Council
Martha Pellegrino, Government Relations Director