



**WILLAMETTE
UNIVERSITY**

College of Law

Curtis Bridgeman
Dean and Professor of Law
245 Winter St. SE, Salem, OR 97301
cbridgem@willamette.edu
willamette.edu/wucl
503-370-6402 Office

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Senator Floyd Prozanski, Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee
Oregon State Senate
900 Court Street NE, S-415
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Prozanski and Members:

My name is Curtis Bridgeman, and I have the privilege of being the Dean of the Willamette University College of Law. I write to support SB 446, which seeks to add much needed updates to the amount and manner of judicial funding. The Bill was introduced at the request of Chief Justice Balmer and the Oregon Circuit Court Judges Association.

I know that others have explained the details of the bill and the context in which it is offered much more eloquently than I can. Since your time is precious, I will not attempt to duplicate their efforts. Instead, I thought I would offer the perspective of someone who is relatively new to the state. I moved to Oregon in June of 2013 from Florida, having spent my entire legal career in the South. Early in my career I clerked for the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, which answers only to the United States Supreme Court. I also was a professor at Florida State University for many years, and Associate Dean there for two.

Since moving here I have been extremely impressed with Oregon's government and political climate. It is, quite simply, a very well-run state. People here are proud of the tradition of bipartisan governance, and rightly so, especially in an era where our country is more and more divided politically. However, many people may not realize that Oregon has just as much reason to be exceptionally proud of its judiciary. I have been amazed at the quality of the judges here. They come from diverse backgrounds in public service, trial work, and business. Their expertise is matched only by their professionalism and dedication to public service. They are innovators of creative, low-cost solutions for the problems that come before them, such as special courts for those suffering mental health issues or for veterans, and expanded mediation services and assistance for pro se litigants. They also are extremely generous with their time, mentoring law students and young lawyers, taking them aside and advising them as to how they can reach more civilized solutions for their clients. Their reputation for excellence extends far beyond the

Pacific Northwest, and indeed is nationwide. Just the other day we had a visiting law professor from Harvard University who went on and on about the quality of the opinions he had read from our state, and I hear this sort of thing all the time.

We should not take our judges for granted. I am told that they have the 49th lowest compensation in the country, ahead of only Mississippi. They deserve better. Judges are almost universally committed to public service, but there are bound to be limits. If we continue to underfund the judiciary, then we will eventually get a court system that such investment deserves. Make no mistake about it: lower quality on the bench will have a huge impact on everyday Oregonians, from the indigent all the way to the businesses we want to attract to the state. It has happened in other states, and could happen here, too.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this matter and for all the work you do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Bridgeman', written in a cursive style.

Curtis Bridgeman

Dean and Professor of Law

cc: Judge Christopher J. Marshall
Judge Mary M. James
Kevin Campbell