

Request for Judicial Salary Increase --- 2015 Legislative Session

The Oregon Legislature should raise the pay of state court judges. Judicial pay levels are inadequate and unlikely to continue to attract and retain highly qualified members of the legal profession. The Oregon Circuit Court Judges Association (OCCJA) asks that the Legislature:



- Increase a circuit judge's annual salary to a total of \$149,351; and
- Write annual cost-of-living increases for judges into Oregon law.

The 2013 Legislature gave judges annual salary increases of \$5,000 in 2014 and \$5,000 in 2015. Circuit court judges now earn \$124,468 a year. Oregon judges are grateful for the increases, but current salaries still do not provide adequate compensation. Cost-of-living adjustments should be incorporated into the statute so that, at a minimum, salaries do not continue to fall behind.

JUDICIAL SALARIES should be set to:

- ***Attract and retain highly qualified judges***

Oregon judges reflect the excellence of the Oregon State Bar. Yet most people know someone who would be a stellar judge but who chooses not to take the pay cut. **With increasing frequency, the Judge is the lowest paid lawyer in the courtroom.** Dozens of State and local government lawyers make significantly more than the judges they appear before. To continue to attract and retain the best and the brightest, judicial salaries must be increased.

- ***Reflect the tremendous trust placed in judges***

Choosing which parent should raise the children or deciding whether to send a convicted offender to prison are momentous decisions that judges make every day. Although it may be tempting to think of judicial salaries as less urgent than funding for other social needs, it is important to recognize that the work of judges supports the work of all our social service agencies. In their daily work, judges craft solutions for our most vulnerable citizens on matters that impact their communities. Creating conditions of probation and parenting plans that work for real people are just two examples.

- ***Recognize the value of judges' contributions as leaders in the community***

Judges serve as leaders in their communities and in the legal profession. Judges participate in charitable activities, act as mentors, teach youth about the court system, support the work of Oregon's law schools and attend community functions. At the same time, judges have given up their right to political participation; they conduct themselves with requisite dignity around the clock; and they manage increasing security concerns for themselves and their families both at work and at home.

- ***Compensate judges for the evolving nature of their work***

The work of judges is changing. Judges are more involved in settlement conferences, spend more time in hearings and trial with self-represented parties, try more cases with non-English speaking litigants, respond to media and victim requests, and monitor cases where ongoing supervision is necessary. Judges

run drug courts, mental health courts, and other problem-solving courts, programs that have remarkable success but require a great deal of judicial involvement. Judges are on-call evenings, holidays and weekends for search warrants and jail probable cause affidavits.

- ***Assure a diverse judiciary***

Judges should be drawn from a wide variety of legal and life experiences that reflect socio-economic, ethnic, racial, gender and practice diversity – not just from the pool of lawyers who are wealthy enough to “give back” to the profession. Adequate compensation levels will help achieve diversity on the Bench. Diversity on the Bench assures access to justice for all parties.

- ***Keep our economy healthy with quick and effective resolution of business disputes***

There are economic benefits from an adequately compensated Judiciary. Oregon has an interest in attracting and retaining businesses, and business leaders rely on the Judiciary to resolve disputes. The quality and efficiency of the Judiciary may affect business decisions to locate and remain here.

The *Survey of Judicial Salaries* published by National Center for State Courts, ranked Oregon judges 49 out of 51 in annual salary comparisons as of July 1, 2014. When salaries are adjusted for inflation, Oregon judges consistently rank 50 out of 51. Trial court judges in several nearby states earn more than Oregon’s trial court judges:

Oregon	California	Washington	Alaska	Nevada	Utah	Wyoming
\$124,468	\$184,610	\$151,809	\$183,252	\$160,000	\$136,500	\$150,000

OREGON JUDICIAL SALARIES DO NOT COMPARE FAVORABLY with other positions of trust and responsibility in the State. Consider the following list of salary comparisons:

U of O Law School Dean	\$243,187	OSB Disciplinary Counsel	\$149,063
Multnomah County Counsel	\$210,253	The Legislative Counsel	\$145,836
Executive Director – OSB	\$200,000	Dept. of Corrections Dentist	\$143,964
Dept. of Corrections Physicians	\$179,716	4-J School District Superintendent	\$192,358
OHA Pharmacy Manager 2	\$176,364	DOJ Deputy Attorney General	\$150,276
Clackamas County DA	\$156,195	DOJ Assistant Attorneys General	\$145,000

JUDICIAL COMPENSATION HAS NOT KEPT PACE with inflation. Before the increase passed in 2013, judges had not received a pay increase in five years. From 2008 to 2013, inflation increased by approximately 9.35%, resulting in a net loss of compensation. Each year that passes without adjustment for inflation effectively decreases judicial compensation.

~ Oregon Circuit Court Judges Association ~

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