

From the desk of Representative Tobias Read



Supplement funding for legal aid with residual class action funds.

- Civil legal aid ensures fairness in the justice system. It provides vital help to low-income and vulnerable Oregonians to protect their livelihoods, their health and safety and their families. About 40% of legal aid's cases are in the area of family law, and almost all involve domestic violence.
- There is a justice gap in Oregon and it is estimated that legal aid has resources to meet about 15% of the legal needs of the poor.
- Civil legal aid is a critical information resource for Oregonians that can't afford to hire a lawyer. Through easy-to-understand forms; legal assistance or representation; and legal self-help—people can know their rights and how to protect them. This also helps civil legal aid streamline the court system and cut down on court costs.
- Access to civil legal services reduces domestic violence, strengthens families and creates opportunity for long term safety and self-sufficiency. It also helps create respect for our justice system. CEJ supports increased funding for these important programs.
- Oregon's legal aid programs receive support from over 80 sources of public and private funding. Ensuring stable, adequate funding will require a multi-pronged approach. Many states use unclaimed class action awards for this purpose and Oregon should join them. The 2014 Task Force on Legal Aid Funding concluded that in order to close the justice gap, legal aid will need increased revenue from existing sources of funding, and also follow other states in locating other funding sources. Cy pres is one such example of what other states do to supplement legal aid funding.
- HB 2700 allows residual funds from class action lawsuits and dedicates those funds to support legal aid and other non-profits.

For the above reasons, CEJ respectfully urges your yes vote in support of HB 2700.