



SID LEIKEN

Lane County Commissioner
Springfield District
sid.leiken@co.lane.or.us

DATE: February 1, 2016
TO: House Committee on Judiciary
RE: HB 4093, relating to courthouses

Chairman Barker and Members of the Committee:

Lane County's Courthouse is seismically vulnerable. It is out of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Its design, from a security standpoint, is fraught with opportunities for truly bad situations for judges, victims, the accused, and visitors.

We began seriously working on a replacement plan not long after the 2008 legislative task force on county courthouses produced their report, and the effort gained additional steam in 2013 when downtown Eugene development discussions were literally occurring at all four points of the compass around our building. Our project was deemed ready for state funding by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in 2014 during a process he designed to provide structure to a systematic upgrading of court facilities across Oregon.

Access to the Oregon Courthouse Capital Improvement Fund is a great example of the partnership that exists between the state and counties, and this tool will provide counties with 25%, or in some cases, 50% of the project costs. That still leaves an enormous amount of money for counties to raise, and we will undoubtedly need to seek voter support for a bond sale to complete our funding package.

I am familiar with HB 4093 and urge the committee to vote DO PASS in support of this measure. HB 4093 is another tool to allow only those counties selected for state courthouse funding to cover their construction costs. I believe adding a user fee into the mix is an appropriate policy at this juncture. In addition to the revenue it will raise, I think it will help leverage future voter support for these kinds of projects.

The process to adopt such a fee as outlined in the bill will work and counties have had past experiences working closely with their Presiding Judges to adopt add-on fees. While I understand the "consistency" rationale that was applied in 2011 to repeal court fee add-ons, the truth is that Circuit Courts are local, and the level of those fees was consistent with local economies. I reject the notion that add on fees impedes access to justice. What impedes access to justice are old county courthouses that cannot reflect a modern justice system. Please pass HB 4093 and continue to support the process now underway to methodically modernize court facilities in Oregon.

(submitted electronically by Alex Cuyler, Lane County Intergovernmental Relations Manager)