

Testimony of Deborah Kafoury, Multnomah County Chair
House Judiciary Committee
HB 4093
February 1, 2016

Chair Barker, members of the committee. I am Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury and I'm happy to be here today to speak in support of HB 4093.

If passed, this bill would allow surcharges on filing fees and certain violations to help fund reconstruction or replacement of unsafe courthouses.

As you have heard in previous testimony, many courthouses throughout the State of Oregon are in dire need of rebuilding. But counties, including Multnomah County, simply cannot fund the entire cost themselves.

In 2013, the legislature created a pathway -- through a 50-50 cost sharing agreement between counties and the state --that allowed counties to begin the critical work of making courthouses structurally and seismically sound.

Our partners in the legislature, the Oregon Judicial Department, and the Association of Oregon Counties devised a method to prioritize courthouse replacement projects. So far, this cost-sharing agreement has enabled Union, Jefferson, Tillamook and Multnomah Counties to begin replacement work, but there are many more in need of assistance.

These buildings are not only are vital to their local communities as a place to administer justice, but are also a large source of revenue for state services. Every year, the Multnomah County Courthouse alone generates \$40 million in fines and fee revenue for the State of Oregon.

We have worked closely with state lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to fund a replacement to our seismically unsafe building and we very much appreciate the partnership.

However, as I mentioned at the last hearing, our legislative request in 2017 will be for \$93 million. That is the state's final contribution to our project.

We have heard that other counties will also be coming forward next session with funding requests--some of them very large. Given the intense competition for state bonding dollars, we need additional local tools to complete our projects.

During the January legislative days you heard from me about a potential user fee, which is a commonly used tool in other states to fund courthouse projects. Our user fee concept has two components:

1. It would allow counties to impose a limited surcharge on civil court filings fees to help fund the state's portion of the courthouse replacement cost.
2. It would allow the presiding judge of a county to impose a minimal surcharge on parking tickets and moving violations. This would be used to help fund the county's portion of the cost.

HB 4093 will help large and small counties address courthouse funding needs without putting additional pressure on the state budget.

Only those counties that have met the Oregon Judicial Department's standards for courthouse replacement and been granted funding by the legislature would be eligible to impose user fees and the funds raised would stay in the county that raised them.

We know some in the legal community may oppose this change, but I think we can all agree that a safe courthouse is essential.

And I want to remind the committee that when the state updated filing fees several years ago, many fees in Multnomah County were significantly reduced despite our higher operating costs. For example, the filing fee for a Divorce went from \$404 to \$273. Under our proposal, the new fee would be \$313.

We are working with the Oregon Judicial Department and other stakeholders on amendments to ensure that the administration of any user fee system goes smoothly. Chris can discuss these changes in further detail.

We thank you again for your support for our courthouse project and hope you will consider this bill.

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