



2015 - 2016

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To: Rep. Jeff Barker, Chair – House Committee on Judiciary
Rep. Ann Lininger, Vice Chair - House Committee on Judiciary
Rep. Andy Olson, Vice Chair - House Committee on Judiciary
Members of the House Committee on Judiciary
Date: February 4, 2016
Re: Testimony in Support of HB 4145 (Judicial Compensation)

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I am Jodie Mooney, Lane County Circuit Court Judge and current President of the Oregon Circuit Court Judges Association (OCCJA). I am here to speak in support of HB 4145 and to urge you to pass this bill out of committee with a positive recommendation.

Last year, this committee supported our requests for salary increase and the COLA provision for judges was enacted. Thank you for that. Even with the COLAs, however, Oregon's judicial salaries remain among the worst in the country.

As Oregon's trial court judges, we serve people from all walks of life - with and without lawyers, often through language interpreters, and almost always on matters of critical importance to them. We make child custody decisions – sometimes on an *ex parte* basis when immediate danger to the child is alleged. We make the hard calls in landlord/tenant disputes and foreclosure cases. We preside over small claims cases as well as complex medical malpractice cases. We decide whether to issue restraining orders in just minutes, every day. We review probable cause determinations made by police officers and we issue search warrants around the clock. We hear the heart-rending statements of victims and we make sentencing decisions that impact the lives of many people.

To do all this, we need judges with experience in all areas of the law. That ensures subject matter competency. And we need judges with enough experience to command the level of respect necessary to administer justice in our Courts. The decision to take one's dispute to Court rather than to the streets depends on a strong and intelligent judiciary. HB 4145 will reinforce the importance of the work of Oregon's judges that will, in turn, enhance the effectiveness of the Judicial Branch. The salary increases reflected in HB 4145 offer compensation levels that will allow Oregon's best lawyers to turn to public service to do this work without having to unduly sacrifice financial security.

More than 100 lawyers in the Oregon Dept. of Justice earn more than the trial judges they appear before. Many of us believe that this pay disparity impacts the dynamic in the courtroom. While that impact is difficult to define, it is apparent when you see it. My own son asked me why I had agreed to a pay cut when I joined the Bench. Is this a less important job? Is it less demanding? Of course the answer to that was "no," but the salary level does not support that conclusion.

The members of the OCCJA Executive Board and I are prepared to answer any questions you may have. Our contact information is on our salary information sheet that I have submitted along with this testimony. Thank you for your consideration.