

House Committee on Early Childhood and Family Supports
2017 Oregon State Legislature

Re: HB 3067

Dear Chair Lively, Vice-Chair Hack, Vice-Chair Piluso, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Katherine H. Denning and I am writing in support of HB 3067, which will establish a Court Care program that provides a safe and nurturing place for children while parents or guardians attend court proceedings or conduct court-related business in Marion and Polk counties.

Currently, children who are brought to the courthouse are either allowed to stay in courtrooms, which exposes them to the ugly details that can accompany legal proceedings, or they are asked to sit in the hallways unattended. Neither option is a good one for children who need a safe and nurturing environment in order to avoid trauma that exposure to adult issues might inflict. The Court Care program established by HB 3067 will protect children from witnessing traumatic court proceedings and will allow litigants, advocates, and court staff to give their full attention to court business.

HB 3067 will improve access to justice for low-income families. The lack of affordable, quality childcare should not prevent parents and caregivers from complying with mandatory court appearances, obtaining a restraining order, challenging an eviction, or exercising their other legal rights. The Court Care program established by HB 3067 will provide necessary childcare to allow parents and caregivers to access the courts.

As a family law practitioner, this is a problem I have seen too many times. When pro se litigants bring their children to court, I cannot effectively advocate and do my job. No one wants to expose these children to messy details of their parent's divorce or separation. I've never actually had a case where the children were asked to sit in the hall; the Judge simply resets the hearing and instructs the parent to come back next time without the child. This is obviously an extreme hardship on the parent who took time off work or school. Especially for low-income families, these inconveniences happening too many times can mean the loss of their jobs, which further exasperates the problem.

I would also like to bring the committee's attention to another group who is affected by this problem: middle and high wage earning litigants who pay increased attorney fees for these hearings where their legal counsel must appear and charge for it, only to have the hearing rescheduled. I make this point to illustrate that having children in the courtroom because of inadequate affordable childcare affects everyone who is present, not just the parent who cannot afford the childcare.

For those reasons, I encourage you to pass HB 3067. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K.H. Denning'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'K' and a distinct 'H'.

Katherine H. Denning
Attorney, Boaz Law Firm