



WASHINGTON COUNTY OREGON

February 13, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Barker
Oregon State Representative &
House Judiciary Committee Chair

RE: HB 2605 Letter of Support

Chair Barker,

As the Director of Community Corrections for Washington County, I offer this letter of support for HB 2605 which provides two additional Judges for our judicial district. Despite significant growth, Washington County has not received a new judicial position in over 14 years and experiences the highest judge per citizen ratio in the state: One judge for every 42,000 citizens (591,000/14 judges).

Community Corrections effectiveness in providing swift and certain sanctions is contingent upon balance within our criminal justice system. In my 30 years' experience, I have seen progress in effective community corrections strategies. The involvement of the community and service providers in specialty courts statewide such as Drug Court, Family Court, Veterans Court, and Mental Health Court are examples of proven multidisciplinary strategies. However, the success of these multidisciplinary specialty courts is contingent upon active judicial participation. The limited judicial resources in Washington County have limited our specialty court participation. The two judges for Washington County included within HB 2605 would allow our judicial district to participate in more specialty courts. In contrast, limited judicial resources may negatively impact Washington County's participation specialty courts and the state's Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

Oregon's Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) is an approach to spending resources more effectively with the goals of reducing recidivism, decreasing prison use, protecting the public, and holding offenders accountable. The JRI strategy is dependent upon is Downward Departure cases. The court is being asked to grant more Downward Departures to Defendant's whose presumptive sentence was prison. The counties were given significant resources through JRI grant funds to provide local services. The challenge facing the Court is the increased judicial time associated with Downward Departures.

I note the above information to highlight the need for additional judicial resources in our community. Further, I believe the additional judges for Washington County would improve service delivery, increase participation in specialty courts, and reduce prison usage by providing the judicial time necessary for Downward Departure cases.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Steven E. Berger, Director
Washington County Community Corrections