



February 8, 2018

Rep. Jeff Barker, Chair House Committee on Judiciary
Members of the Committee

RE: HB 4097

Members of the Committee,

The Oregon Library Association (OLA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 4097. OLA's mission is to provide advocacy, education, leadership, and collaboration to continually strengthen Oregon's libraries and the communities we serve.

County law libraries have always supported and advocated for additional services to pro se litigants. Law librarians have served as "legal resource navigators" to non-attorneys for decades, helping pro se court users understand the justice system, find materials to help them comprehend their legal matter, and gain information on legal processes. Public libraries typically aren't able to meet their patrons' complex legal reference needs, and many in Oregon rely on the specialized expertise offered at county law libraries.

With that said, county law libraries are not opposed to additional efforts taken by OJD, such as a court facilitation program, to further help the public. However, we assert that facilitation programs, while complementary, serve a different purpose than law libraries, and there is justifiable need for both. If a county is not effectively meeting the legal needs of its community, the court and county together – including county law library staff – *should* collectively create a more serviceable model. However, as it seems library stakeholders weren't actively involved with HB 4097, **we would ask for additional time and input to be considered before adopting broad changes to the law library statutes.**

We are also concerned that there may be misconceptions about the importance of county law libraries, namely that all legal resources are now online, and that lawyers no longer utilize law libraries. Most online legal resources are *not* available for free or at low cost, and those that are aren't a substitute for the trained, professional assistance and plentiful collection that a law library offers its community.

Further, scores of lawyers and judges *do* use county law libraries. Solo and small firm attorneys, in particular, rely heavily on county law libraries. Conversely, in Multnomah, many Portland large firm librarians – as well as public law librarians from outside Oregon's largest county – depend greatly on the Multnomah Law Library collection in

order to respond to their patrons' legal research needs. We would like assurance that the needs of Multnomah County's 800,000 residents – and, indeed, all of Oregon – will continue to be served by access to ample legal resources.

Funding for county law library programs is already very limited, especially in rural counties. Diverting funds to a court facilitation program may deprive our communities' lawyers, students, investigators, researchers, *and* pro se litigants of a crucial resource. While the development of court facilitation programs is important to all counties, the current county law library funding allocation is likely not enough to sustain law libraries, court facilitation programs, and mediation/conciliation services.

County law libraries offer a critical and unparalleled resource, completely free of charge, to all those who seek legal knowledge. OLA supports the Sponsor's goal to provide meaningful court navigation services, but urges a slowdown to the changes sought to the law library statutes.