

March 26, 2019

The Honorable Jackie Winters The Honorable  
Carla Piluso Co-chairs, Public Safety  
Subcommittee

Re: SB 5513, Oregon Judicial Department budget

Dear Senator Winters and Representative Piluso:

I am writing to ask that you fully fund the Oregon Judicial Department (SB5513).

I have personally spent many hours in the courts that would be affected by the proposed cut. As president of the Foster and Adoptive Parent Association of Malheur County and a foster parent, I am exposed to the many cases that are before the courts in question. Without the critical role that these judges and courts provide the lives of children, families and seniors would be at even greater risk.

Without the courts to provide timely restraining orders in violent domestic situation, without the court oversight to protect children in peril, families in dire situations and seniors without resources, many of those who are in immediate distress and danger would be left in a position where they are likely to be harmed, abused or worse.

I have personally sat in courtrooms where these critical decisions have been made. I am currently the foster parent of a three-year-old who has been in my home since he was a seriously injured infant. Without the immediate intervention of the court, this child would not have had obtained vital medical attention so critically needed in a timely manner.

Our court system is currently overtaxed. I feel it is extremely unethical to cut services in an area as critically needed and to place pressure on a system that serves such a vulnerable part of our society. If a cut in budget is needed, it is morally responsible to cut less vital services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janelle Bennett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Janelle Bennett

President of the Foster and Adoptive Association of Malheur County  
cc: Marilee Aldred, TCA, Malheur County Circuit Court

LARRY SULLIVAN  
Attorney at Law

---

280 A Street East  
P.O. Box 220  
Vale, Oregon 97918

Katie Braniff, Paralegal  
Megan Burkhardt, Legal Assistant

(541) 473-3141  
fax: (541) 473-2651  
email: sullivan@valelawyers.com

March 24, 2019

Marilee Aldred,  
Trial Court Administrator  
Malheur County Circuit Court  
251 B Street West  
Vale, OR 97918  
*Sent via email*

Re: Proposed Malheur County Circuit Court Budget Cuts

Dear Ms. Aldred:

I have been practicing law as a trial attorney in Malheur County since 1978. A high percentage of my trial work is in domestic relations. For the last 23 years, I have also regularly worked as a child custody mediator in the County's mediation program. I am extremely familiar with the operations of the Circuit Court and its staff. The other day you informed me that the Malheur County Circuit Court may lose up to 6% of its budget because of the State's current funding priorities. In my opinion, that would be a disaster.

The current Malheur County Circuit Court budget is less than it was in 2008, without any corresponding decrease in the need for services. Staff costs account for virtually all of the Court budget. A budget cut of 6% could not be absorbed without reducing staff hours. This is generally true of all the rural counties of eastern Oregon.

Malheur County has one of the highest poverty levels in the State of Oregon. As a result, the Circuit Court has very high proportion of pro se litigants, particularly in domestic relations cases. Although Malheur County has a small legal aid staff for poor litigants, that staff is able to provide only minimal services to domestic relations parties. The only regular resource poor pro se litigants in Malheur County have to rely on is Circuit Court staff who provide them with the Judicial Department's family law forms and help them fill out those forms. I know that current staff members spend many hours every month assisting pro se litigants fill out forms. This critical service will inevitably suffer if these budget cuts are instituted.

In my own legal practice, I try to provide some services to pro se litigants by doing inexpensive flat fee initial consultations and providing unbundled services, but many of them need more help than I am able to provide. In many of my mediation cases, I am the first and only attorney they will talk to; however, as a mediator, I cannot ethically give them specific legal advice or help them with forms. They would be completely lost without the help of Court staff.

Marilee Aldred,  
March 24, 2019  
Page 2

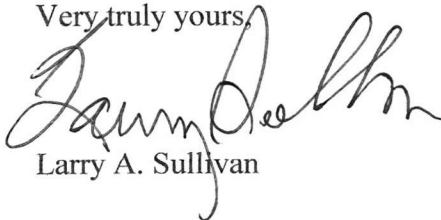
Prior budget cuts have already reduced the hours that the Court staff can serve the public. Malheur County is large, with a mostly rural population. The southern border of the County is almost 200 miles from Vale, the County seat. Public transportation to the courthouse is extremely limited. Many residents do not own cars, and have to rely on friends or relatives for transportation. Restricting the Court's hours of operation further because of budget cuts will particularly impact these people.

Malheur County has a disproportionate number of children in the juvenile dependency system. The Oregon Judicial Department has identified the need for a third circuit judge in Malheur County primarily for juvenile court and dependency cases. Cutting the court budget in Malheur County will have an immediate impact on Malheur County's poor children and families in the dependency system. These are some of the poorest, most vulnerable people in the entire state of Oregon.

In short, these proposed budget cuts affecting poor, rural counties like Malheur County will cause harm to Oregon residents who are already underserved. There has to be a better way to run a court system.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to share my thoughts as well as my frustration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry A. Sullivan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Larry" being the most prominent.

Larry A. Sullivan

cc: Sen. Cliff S. Bentz  
Rep. Lynn Findley