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Sent by email only: jwmps.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov
RE: SB 5513, Oregon Judicial Department budget

To The Oregon Legislature:

I am writing to ask that you fully fund the Oregon Judicial Department (SB 5513).

Many people understand the role of the court in the criminal justice system, but I wanted to add some information on how it affects me/my organization.

I am the administrator of the largest defense funded group representing parents and children in DHS dependency and delinquency cases. These cases are complex, emotional, and have very specific legislatively imposed timelines under which the court must hold hearings and resolve the matters. The reasons for the timelines are solid. These cases involve people's children, and whether it is appropriate to remove them from a parent's care. The court must have a shelter hearing within 24 hours of removal. The court is supposed to have reached disposition on a case within 60 days. These are legislatively mandated rights of a party in a dependency case.

The court often struggles to squeeze in the shelter hearings within 24 hours. The hearings, by nature, are emergency hearings which cannot be planned for weeks in advance. The court often doesn't know until a few hours beforehand that such a hearing will occur. Some days there are none. Some days there are several. I have seen judges, staff, and attorneys stay well after 5 p.m. on these days in order to ensure the rights of the parties are fully explored.

The court regularly struggles to reach disposition on a dependency case within the required 60 days. There are simply not enough days, enough judges, or enough staff to accommodate these mandates. A further reduction in staff or funding would be absolutely catastrophic for a system that is already hanging on by a thread. Imagine being in court, DHS has removed your child, you are emotional and confused because it is a system with which you are not familiar, and the court tells you that you have to come back in three months for your next hearing, which is the date you can finally contest the allegations brought against you. THREE MONTHS. During that time your child may be in foster care and DHS gets to call the shots. That is unacceptable. We can do better.

There has been a lot of attention in the media lately about juvenile matters, DHS, and how the system needs fixing. If the legislature refuses to fully fund the court system, therefore further impairing the system's ability to address these types of cases, you will be sending a clear message that the safety of children is not a top priority for this state. As I have said – we can do better.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca S. Schaleger', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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