

To: House Judiciary Committee  
From: Alicia Temple, Oregon Law Center  
Date: February 9, 2020  
Re: HB 4142 Support for Co-located Advocates

Chair Sanchez and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I respectfully request your support for HB 4142 to allow the Judicial Department the flexibility it needs to improve the payment plan system and increase participation with the courts.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. The vast majority of our clients have incomes at or below the federal poverty level, and work hard to provide basic necessities for themselves and their family. Despite Oregon's recent economic recovery, many vulnerable low-income people continue to struggle to make ends meet. Oregon's housing crisis has exacerbated the challenges for our low-income community, and an increasing number of our clients are forced to make terrible choices between paying for rent, food, health care, or other necessities.

Traffic tickets are a fairly common occurrence among drivers, but the fines imposed have vastly different impacts on Oregonians. For moderate and high-income Oregonians, a ticket for a traffic violation is a minor inconvenience—they simply pay the fine and move on with their lives. However, for the 13% of Oregonians living in poverty, a \$100 ticket can be an insurmountable obstacle. Even when looking at just above the federal poverty line, 125%, FPL a family of four is only making \$32,188. If an individual gets a \$200 traffic ticket, they may have to make impossible choices between food, rent, or paying off their fine. If someone cannot afford to pay, their driver license can be suspended. The reality is that to avoid losing their job, and to continue taking care of their family, people continue to drive. This creates a cycle of debt that is almost impossible for low-income families to escape.

Data from around the country is increasingly showing there is a better way to hold people accountable for their traffic fines: creating accessible payment plans. By reducing the fees to join a payment plan, allowing low monthly minimums, communicating clearly with individuals and encouraging payments through clear notices and reminders, jurisdictions from California to Florida are seeing increases in payment plan participation and revenue. On OLIS you will find a table with a few of these examples. These methods are better for low-income Oregonians, and have better results for courts.

Some of these changes individual courts currently have the discretion to do, but some require a statutory change to reform our fines and fees system in a way that prioritizes safety and accountability with proportionate consequences. HB 4121 is an important step towards allowing courts better discretion to reduce the harm to individuals from fines and fees.