

Testimony: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction

04-09-21

Co-Chair Girod and Co-Chair Holvey and Members of the Subcommittee,

Good afternoon, I am Xan Augerot, Benton County Board Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Benton County's Justice System Improvement Program and our request from the Courthouse Capital Construction and Improvement Fund for a new courthouse. This project has been prioritized by the AOC-OJD Courthouse Committee for investment.

Our Justice System Improvement Program is ambitious and forward-looking. It seeks to assess, design, and implement improvements to the full span of the justice system, including relevant programs and facilities. New or expanded programs include pretrial services, crisis respite care, enhanced mobile mental health crisis services, data analysis (including implicit bias), and developmental disabilities training for responders.

In addition to the courthouse, proposed new facilities include a correctional facility, crisis respite center, law enforcement building, and offices for the district attorney. Upgrades to the existing 1888 Courthouse are also under consideration.

The proposed new courthouse is an integral piece of our Justice System Improvement Program. It would provide a desperately needed alternative to Benton County's Historic Courthouse, which was first occupied in 1889 and is the oldest courthouse in Oregon still being used for its original purpose. The proposed courthouse will meet current courthouse standards and improve on all attributes of the existing Courthouse, especially:

- Seismic resilience
- Safety for staff, clients and people in custody
- Compliance with current codes, including ADA
- Energy efficiency
- Appropriate courtroom sizing and ergonomically designed work spaces

Capital costs for the Justice System Improvement Program are significant, with most funding coming from a bond measure planned for May 2022. With input from two advisory committees, the County has established a target value for the bond of \$100 million. Our engineering design firm estimates Courthouse costs at about \$40 million.

Without CCC&I matching funds, the cost of our bond measure will increase by about 20 percent, or the County will have to eliminate one of its proposed new facilities.

In FY 2019-2021, the Courthouse fund awarded Benton County \$2M in match dollars for courthouse planning. I am here asking for your support for SB 5505 to allocate \$26.6M in bond authority in the 2021-23 biennium for final design and construction of a new Benton County courthouse. Thank you.