



April 14, 2021

Dear Co-Chairs Gorsek and Sollman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Classroom Law Project, I am writing to you today to urge you to support fully funding the Oregon Judicial Department in order to ensure that all Oregonians have access to a judicial system that truly provides them with recourse through fair, timely, and efficient resolution of disputes.

As you know, the mission of Classroom Law Project is to prepare Oregon Students to become active, engaged, and informed participants in our democratic society. This purpose is driven by our deeply-held belief that the effective functioning of each of our institutions and branches of government is critical to ensure a free and just society that protects the rights of all citizens, and provides equitable opportunities for them to pursue their aspirations for themselves and their families.

However, at the same time that we are striving to instill in our young people an understanding of, respect for, and commitment to our system of government, the effective functioning of our court system has been threatened over the past decade by slowly eroding state support. Some cuts have been successfully managed by embracing new technology, such as Oregon eCourt – and looking forward, the Oregon Civil Legal Access Portal Pilot Project is an important next step in merging the court's commitments to harnessing technology and access to justice.

But even with new technology providing improved access to remote court users, reductions in staffing, limitations on the hours in which court services are available, and delays in resolving cases, all call into question our commitment to provide justice completely and without delay to all who need it.

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, our courts face the daunting task of working through a backlog of cases caused by the suspension of most in-person hearings. Managing this critical need might seem insurmountable even in the best budget climate. We encourage this committee to provide the courts with the support they need to meet this difficult challenge.

We support Chief Justice Walters' budget recommendations that will allow for full access to timely and responsive court services for all Oregonians. While recognizing that you face many difficult choices during this session, I ask that you ensure the adequate funding of this critical function of government.

Sincerely,

Erin Esparza
Executive Director

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Erin Esparza

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