



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 14

To: Public Safety Ways and Means Subcommittee
Senator Chris Gorsek, Co-Chair
Representative Janeen Sollman, Co-Chair

Co-Chairs Gorsek and Sollman,

Oregonians deserve a court system that is timely, accessible, and fair. However, in Central Oregon, Oregonians do not have equitable access to the justice system due to a shortage of judges in Deschutes County. We respectfully request funding for two judicial positions in Deschutes County this legislative session.

It has been 18 years since a judgeship was last added to the Deschutes County Circuit Court. Since then, the County's population has grown by 57%, making Deschutes the fastest growing county in the state. Deschutes County is expected to keep growing. Today, the Oregon Judicial Department estimates Deschutes County is currently 2.5 judges below the number of judges actually needed to address case filings in a timely manner, and more and more community members see delays in accessing justice through the court. Without the addition of two judgeships, Deschutes County will continue to fall further behind in being able to add access to justice.

In 2020, the Joint Committee on Ways and Means approved funding to help close the gap and fund two judgeships in Deschutes County before the session abruptly ended. Since then, the need for greater judicial capacity in Deschutes County has continued to grow.

Deschutes County has routinely committed financial resources to help supplement the needs of our local court. Deschutes County has provided the funding to pay for the juvenile referee position to enable Deschutes County to have a dedicated juvenile delinquency docket. Deschutes County has also funded the Release Officer position to ensure our Judges are making the best decisions regarding pre-trial detention.

Knowing the ever growing need for two additional judge positions, Deschutes County is prepared to fund the full \$24 million courthouse expansion if necessary. We believe that Deschutes County is the only county in the State prepared to make this type of investment.

Additionally Deschutes County has a track record of finding innovative strategies for improving services for community members in the face of diminished capacity This includes advancing informal domestic relations trials to simplify the divorce process for self-represented litigants, jury service text alerts, a pilot site for differentiated case management in dependency cases, and Lawyer-in-the-Library, a program that provides convenient services for community members through a collaboration between the court and the local bar.

Deschutes County is committed to providing the funding needed to have a quality justice system and we ask the State to partner with us to help meet our growing needs. Please help our community continue providing high quality and timely court services by funding two needed judicial positions in Deschutes County.

Thank you for your consideration,



Rep. Jason Kropf
House District 54



Rep. Jack Zika
House District 53