

Oregon State Legislature Joint Ways and Means Committee
Testimony of Richard L Withers, Hood River

Re:SB 555 STATE BUDGET - CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 2 PUBLIC TESTIMONY
Funding and Implementing Eviction Avoidance Mediation Programs

To the Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner-Hayward, Rayfield and Members:
Thank you for this opportunity to address an urgent need and a promising solution.

I am a member of the board of Six Rivers Dispute Resolution Center, one of Oregon's local community mediation centers; Six Rivers also serves Klickitat and Skamania Counties on the Washington side of the Columbia Gorge.

I urge you to include support for implementation of local programs of Eviction Avoidance Mediation as you consider budget priorities.

In retirement from law practice and work in local and state governments, I have found that formal mediation provides an excellent opportunity to resolve problems that parties have previously thought were unsurmountable.

Not only does mediation provide a less costly and often speedier mechanism for resolving conflicts, but the process also offers an opportunity for the parties to acquire skills that may help them cooperate and collaborate in the future - not only within the current landlord and tenant relationship - but with others ranging from family members and neighbors to business disagreements and disputes with government agencies. In mediation, the parties often fashion creative solutions for their mutual benefit which, in turn, can lead to more positive and productive future relationships.

When we think about landlord-tenant issues and eviction, we often visualize an urban scene. Here in the 2nd District, as volunteers for our local warming shelter and our local food bank, my wife and I have seen up-close the impact of poor housing and homelessness on our rural neighbors. And we have also seen the spirit of neighbor-helping-neighbor which is alive in eastern Oregon.

Six Rivers has been approved by Washington State to implement an Eviction Resolution program in counties we serve in that state. The Washington judiciary conducted a pilot program in six counties and has now begun implementation across the state utilizing dispute resolution centers. I believe a similar model could be of great benefit to communities across Oregon. The talented and experienced staff, mediators and volunteers of Six Rivers can be a great resource for you in developing and implementing an eviction prevention and resolution program for Oregon.

Please prioritize implementation of mediation as a tool for eviction prevention.

Richard L. Withers
Hood River, Oregon