

TO: Oregon Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue  
CHAIR: Senator Mark Meek  
RE: SJR 26  
Date: 5/31/2023  
Position: SUPPORT

Dear Oregon Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue:

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for SJR 26 to proposes amendment to Oregon Constitution to cease requirement of returning surplus revenue to personal income taxpayers. For the same reasons I support SB 774, I also support SJR 26 to remove the kicker from Oregon's constitution.

I am an Oregonian and have been a Portland resident since 2009. As you already know, Portland and Oregon generally have experienced significant hardship; however, I would not point to the pandemic as the sole source of problems the state is experiencing.

- As early as 2011-12 I began to notice an increase in homelessness. Data has shown that Oregon has been **#1 in unsheltered homelessness and youth homelessness** in the entire US;
- Moreover, as the pandemic unfolded, lack of investment in technology caused **Oregon unemployment software to crash**, leaving thousands of people without the means to obtain temporary relief;
- Oregon has a **shortage of public defenders** depriving people of their constitutional rights to a speedy trial;
- Oregon's **state mental hospital lacks capacity** to serve those in need while placing the community at large in danger;
- Oregon's **foster care system is woefully underfunded** and mismanaged presenting additional barriers to youth from low income communities;
- A significant number of **Oregon state jobs remain unfilled**;
- Oregon **lacks staffing to support re-entry programs** that prevent recidivism.

I currently sit on a board of directors for a Washington County homeless service provider, have consulted and written grants for several Metro area nonprofits, and work with small business via economic development. In 10 years, I've visited well over 500 businesses as part of my work including support for manufacturers. It is astounding to hear time and again that there isn't a budget to support community needs when we have a \$5.5 billion kicker slated to disappear from the state's coffers. With \$5.5 billion we could:

- Improve infrastructure including better **mass transit**;
- Open regional **detox centers and rehabilitation** services;
- Build thousands more units of **housing**;
- Invest in **re-entry programs** that serve local employers, such as manufacturing while supporting people facing challenges as they return to the community;
- Offer manufacturers grants and loans to invest in **greener production** and equipment;
- **Fill state positions** that facilitate services;

- Develop strategic **homeless assistance and prevention** services.

The list goes on. While people may oppose this measure because they want some of their taxes refunded, doing so is incredibly shortsighted. Those receiving the largest refunds are those in the highest income brackets, meanwhile middle income earners struggle to find reasonably priced rent. We must invest in our state with significant financial investments in housing.

In short, the kicker is a fluke that should never exist. The state legislature and economic analysis office must work together to first ensure our needs are adequately assessed, which has not been the case, then apply the revenue Oregon taxpayers willingly paid to address community needs. We cannot continue down this road of short budgets and big problems while billions of dollars are taken off the table.

It also bears mentioning that the state of our economy should not be determined solely by how much revenue Oregon collects, but also who is paying it. The smaller the number of people paying the highest in taxes, the worse our economy is in reality. Our economic reality and our needs have gone ignored for far too long.

Thank you for taking the time to review my testimony.

Sincerely,

Aimee Sukol