

Circuit Court of the State of Oregon for Jackson County



Jackson County Justice Building – 100 S. Oakdale, Medford, OR 97501
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Benjamin M. Bloom, Judge

January 28, 2023

The Honorable Floyd Prozanski, Chair
Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee

Dear Chair Prozanski and Committee Members:

As the Presiding Judge of the Jackson County Circuit Court, I am submitting this letter in support of the Oregon Judicial Department's request for new judicial positions contained in Senate Bill 235. For my entire judicial career, my guiding principles have been adherence to the rule of law and access to justice. Our lack of sufficient judicial resources threatens access to justice.

While there is statistical information demonstrating an increase in population in all of Oregon's judicial districts and the increase in case loads, I write to inform you specifically of the situation in Jackson County and our need for judicial resources. By standard statistical measures, Jackson County currently needs 6 judicial positions, but even adding one will help alleviate crowded dockets in the criminal, family law, and juvenile arenas. Despite our best efforts, the number of pending cases has increased 7.6% in the last year – more than 500 cases.

We run three main dockets every day. Our criminal docket is overflowing, despite recent reductions in our pending criminal cases. The criminal docket also includes an innovative aid-and-assist docket to manage and treat those individuals who are or may be unable to aid and assist in their own criminal matters. Jackson County has the sixth-largest number of aid-and-assist cases in the state, and the number of those cases have grown significantly in the last two years. That docket requires an enormous amount of judicial resources to help monitor individual defendants' conditions in limited local facilities, the county jail, or the Oregon State Hospital.

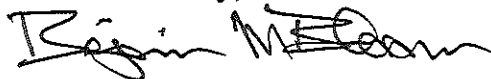
Our judges also run two treatment courts, a mental health court and a court for repeat property crime offenders. Both courts are improving participants' lives and have the added benefit of saving the state significant money by keeping individuals out of prison or mental health facilities.

Our civil docket includes our child custody, domestic relations, and civil cases. It also includes landlord tenant cases and protective proceedings such as Stalking, Family Abuse Restraining Orders, and Elder Abuse Restraining Orders. In approximately 75 percent of the domestic relations and child custody cases neither party has an attorney. There are even more unrepresented litigants in the protective proceedings and the landlord tenant cases. Many of these cases involve highly vulnerable individuals who need prompt attention. The same is true of our juvenile and probate dockets. Both caseloads would benefit from additional judicial resources to timely facilitate thoughtful judicial resolutions for at risk populations.

Unfortunately, our court simply does not have enough judicial officers to hear these matters or other civil disputes including those brought by injured people as quickly as we would like. The lack of judges has consequences for residents, including the elderly and children of Jackson County and Oregon who are entitled to timely resolution of their pressing legal issues.

Few people relish the opportunity to be in court. Individuals come to court as a final resort to get matters resolved fairly and promptly. We owe them and the community a court where they can be heard and where they can obtain justice. While one judge will not remedy the constraints on judicial demand, it will improve the situation by allowing our court to provide additional hearings in juvenile, civil, and domestic matters, including child custody cases. Thank you for your time in considering this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have specific questions or if you would like further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Benjamin M. Bloom". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

BENJAMIN M. BLOOM