

March 16, 2023

Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee and  
House Committee on Judiciary

RE: Senate Bill 306

I am providing this testimony in support of Senate Bill 306. I have worked as a Paralegal in Oregon for 18 years. I have a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration and an Associates of Science in Paralegal Studies. I served as President of Oregon Paralegal Association (“OPA”) from 2019 to 2022 as well as various positions on the OPA board since 2016.

Early in my career, I worked with disabled Oregonians applying for disability benefits. I witnessed firsthand the access to justice that exists to low-income individuals. Many individuals applying for disability benefits experience other simultaneous legal matters such as evictions or family law issues. The resources available to those individuals back in 2005 are the same as now: referrals to The Oregon State Bar.

During the process of this bill moving through its various forms, there’s discussion I’ve heard several times from some attorneys and attorney groups. Comments like this program taking clients away from attorneys. I’m going to state this very clearly. This program is meant to help Oregonians for whom attorneys aren’t helping.

During my time as President of OPA, I would receive inquiries from Oregonians seeking help. They have tried everything and everyone. The lowest rate attorneys requested several thousand-dollar retainers. For an individual facing eviction, this is unrealistic and unattainable. OPA’s policy is to provide a response that paralegals are not permitted to practice law in Oregon and direct the individual to the Oregon State Bar’s lawyer referral service. The Oregon State Bar only directs these individuals back to the low-cost attorneys that they cannot afford. It’s an endless cycle that provides no assistance to those who need guidance to navigate our legal system.

As experienced paralegals, we often have the answers individuals are seeking. However, under the current rules, we are not permitted to offer our assistance. The current bill before you, provides safeguards to the community and is administered by the Oregon State Bar, the same entity to which all practicing Oregon attorneys must be a member. This program will not fix the access to justice problem in Oregon nor will it fully bridge the gap, but it is a step in the right direction.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this bill.

Jered Brown, RP