



March 20, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary

Subject: Opposition to SB 953

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee,

My name is Zakir Khan, and I am a Government Relations Manager at Washington County.

I speak today on behalf of Washington County in opposition to SB 953 because it is a workforce issue to be solved through the development of incentives for Forensic Pathologists and reclassification of salaries by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS). I want to make clear that this bill exacerbates the problem rather than fixes it.

From speaking with the Oregon State Police (OSP) and the Governor's office this bill is being brought to deal with insufficient staff and compensation for the state medical examiners through the Oregon State Police. We empathize with this challenge as we have our own workforce concepts this session dealing with these very issues.

According to The Oregonian, DAS is currently reviewing the classification system that has led to Oregon being ranked on the low end of the spectrum for pay in the country for this profession. Further, as the reports I have uploaded into the record state the lack of incentives that our state offers Forensic Pathologists has made Oregon non-competitive when it comes to the overall compensation package that it can offer them.

We see this problem as a workforce problem and this current bill does not solve that workforce problem in fact it exacerbates it. This bill outsources the problem to counties who already lack staff and facilities.

From what our county has researched, there are few Forensic Pathologist graduates, so forcing counties to compete for these graduates nationally with no funds means these services will not happen. As it is, the market for health professionals in Oregon is already tight, with hospitals having to continuously rely upon temporary staffing. How are counties supposed to compete?

We do believe there are viable alternatives to this bill as currently drafted, DAS can reclassify the salary scales for these workers as the Oregon State Police have requested. Further, this bill or another bill could be amended to add incentives for Forensic Pathologists including but not limited to scholarships, loan repayment, housing assistance and retention bonuses.

We tried to achieve this by adding Forensic Pathologists to one of our own concepts (even going so far to include them in our bill marketing materials that I have put into the record) that

died in a committee last week. Still, there are other viable workforce incentive bills still alive that could utilize the Health Care Provider Incentive Program to achieve these incentives.

Washington County is happy to partner with the Governor's office to help them solve their workforce issues and we have been engaging with them and the Oregon State Police since we first heard of the original memo on this subject.

What we cannot accept is something that burdens us with more responsibilities and no resources to be responsive to them. As the most diverse county in Oregon, such a burden would result in a cut of valuable public services which our county provides and would negatively impact our equity goals.

Thank you,

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