

Co-Chairs Girod, Holvey and members of the committee,

Our Board and staff have been closely tracking HB 5005, as the fate of full funding for our new Courthouse project depends upon it. We respectfully request that the bill include an additional \$5 million in bonding authority toward the state's 50% share of our new Benton County Courthouse.

The historic Benton County Courthouse, built in 1888, is the oldest courthouse in the Pacific Northwest currently being used for its original and intended purpose. Though structurally sound, the building would not withstand a major earthquake. Additionally, the building presents numerous challenges in meeting the day-to-day operational demands of the Courts, District Attorney's offices, law enforcement, defense bar, and patrons. Operational issues at the Courthouse range from tight corridors to cramped office spaces, ADA non-compliance, inadequate court rooms, lack of adequate staff and public space, inadequate separation of offenders and the public, lack of courthouse security, no attorney/client conference rooms, and one elevator. With as many as 150 to 250 people in the courthouse at one time, the building is too small and was never intended to be used as it is today.

The County, in partnership with the State, is moving forward with a new 34,600SF Benton County courthouse. The new Courthouse is an element of the County's Justice System Improvement Program (JSIP). JSIP is the largest capital improvement program in Benton County history, with total facilities expenses estimated in excess of \$185 million. Planned and proposed facilities will address community safety, mental health, and homelessness and housing services.

In 2021, the legislature approved a \$20.4 million matching grant through the States' OCC&I fund for a new courthouse. The County is borrowing its 50-percent match. Since funds were approved by the Legislature, the state and nation have experienced unprecedented construction cost escalation. The Association of General Contractors December 2022 edition of its Construction Inflation Alert states, "For nearly three years the U.S. construction industry has been buffeted by unprecedented volatility in materials costs, supply-chain bottlenecks, and a tight labor market." According to the Inflation Alert, the index for a wide range of construction inputs reached a record-high annual rate of 24% in June 2021. Year-over-year increases remained at or above 20% from May 2021 through April 2022, and were 11.2% for October 2021 to October 2022.

Given the unprecedented cost escalation and with guidance from its design and engineering consultant DLR Group, the County revised its estimate for the new courthouse project from \$40.8 million to approximately \$50 million. The increase necessitates an additional \$5 million borrowing by the County (borrowing the County is prepared to assume), and a parallel increased in matching funds from the State.

The County respectfully asks the subcommittee to prioritize and approve the additional \$5 million matching funds, for allocation in the 2023/25 biennium, to complete the new Benton County Courthouse project.