

Co-chairs Steiner and Sanchez, and members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee,

I traveled over 100 miles to the road show in Portland and did not get to provide my verbal testimony. My name is Andrea Pacheco, and I'm the Director of Six Rivers Dispute Resolution Center serving Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Wheeler, and Hood River counties. I would like to express my support and ask for your support of Senate Bill 600.

I feel like a tiny voice in a sea of many, especially after not getting a chance to speak, but I went on behalf of rural communities that rely on the 15 conflict resolution centers statewide providing mediation and training services at low to no cost through state funding, under ORS Chapter 36.

For decades, we have leveraged this state investment together with matched resources, including partnerships, grants, contracts, donations, and community volunteers. And we have leveraged it to respond to new and emergent community issues.

However, in the last 10 years, the critical base level investment by the state has decreased, despite expanded requests from our communities to assist with de-escalation in schools, organizations, and adult and juvenile justice systems.

Clearly, community dispute resolution centers are key community partners. We have demonstrated how mediation supports the coordinated houselessness prevention and response system, all levels of education, access to justice, and much more.

Our partners, like the Mid-Columbia Community Action Council, report that clients who are facing eviction, prefer mediation, even over the legal assistance that is available. That especially in rural communities, mediation is a more friendly approach, bringing in a third party who can help ensure a good outcome for all parties.

When I visited with grange members of the South Wasco Alliance in the rural town of Wamic this week, they re-iterated the polarization they see and the need to support neighborly relations when disputes arise, and how they would like to see their community be encouraged and assisted to resolve their disputes through mediation, rather than it remain unresolved, further escalate, or result in violence or litigation.

That is exactly what the state funds the community dispute resolution centers to do. However, we need sustainable funding to do it. We would receive sustainable funding from SB600, to maintain the current statewide network, and to continue to respond to the emergent needs of our diverse state, so please, support it. Thank you.

Andrea Pacheco

Executive Director, Six Rivers Dispute Resolution Center