



FIFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

COUNTY OF CLACKAMAS
807 MAIN STREET
OREGON CITY, OREGON 97045

Court Administrator

503-655-8670

Traffic/Accounting

503-655-8447

Case Processing

503-655-8447

Collections

503-655-3957

February 5, 2024

The Honorable Floyd Prozanski, Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Urgent Need for an Additional Judge for the Clackamas County Circuit Court

Dear Sen. Prozanski:

As the judges and the trial court administrator for the Clackamas County Circuit Court, we write to request your support for Senate Bill 1541, introduced by Chief Justice Flynn to add one circuit court judge in each of the circuit courts for Clackamas, Jackson, and Washington counties. Approving SB 1541 is a critical step toward meeting the needs of those communities for timely justice.

Whether you measure need by population or workload, the Clackamas County Circuit Court needs additional judicial positions. As Oregon's third most populous county, Clackamas County has fewer judicial positions – eleven positions - than certain other Oregon counties with smaller populations. We want every circuit court to have the judicial resources they need. The legislature's support for a new courthouse has removed an overwhelming barrier to adding new judicial positions and will improve the quality of justice in Clackamas County.

We do not have enough judges to meet our community's need for justice. To minimize delays in case processing because of our limited number of judges, it is common for a case to be handled by a different judge at different decision points in the case, rather than by one judge from start to finish. This can create confusion and frustration for court participants and can diminish judicial understanding of nuanced situations.

Furthermore, and to maximize judicial time spent on hearing cases, judges can be assigned multiple trials on a given day, even if only one can proceed. As a result, multiple parties may arrive at the courthouse for trial only to learn their case is not proceeding that day.

More cases are being filed than we can decide under Judicial Department timeliness standards in juvenile, criminal, domestic relations, and adult protective matters. The number of overall pending cases has increased almost seven percent from 2022 to 2023.

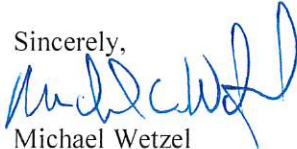
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This unfortunate situation creates other negative impacts as well. Our circuit's effort to have judges emphasize conducting hearings and trials to adjudicate as many cases as possible limits the time needed for case preparation, legal research, decision writing, and participation in important trainings.

In addition, and very importantly, crowded dockets can leave parties feeling rushed and unheard. Despite all our efforts to move through dockets quickly and efficiently, our circuit struggles to meet deadlines for timely case processing. As a result, community members suffer.

We want to thank the entire Assembly for its support for a new courthouse for Clackamas County. The new courthouse, which will open a little over a year from now, will dramatically improve the safety of people who work and visit in the building. It will also improve our ability to provide quality justice services to our community. Giving Clackamas County Circuit Court the judicial resources it needs to utilize the new building is critical to support full access to justice.


Sincerely,



Michael Wetzel
Presiding Judge



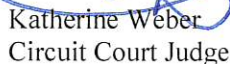
Jeffrey Jones
Circuit Court Judge



Susie Norby
Circuit Court Judge



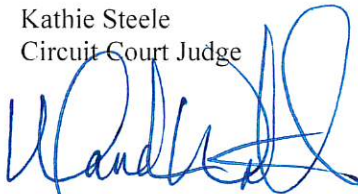
Kathie Steele
Circuit Court Judge



Katherine Weber
Circuit Court Judge



Heather Karabeika
Circuit Court Judge



Ulanda Watkins
Circuit Court Judge



Ann Liringer
Circuit Court Judge



Cody Weston
Circuit Court Judge



Thanh Tran
Circuit Court Judge



Debbie Spradley
Trial Court Administrator

cc: The Honorable Fred Girod, Senate District 9
The Honorable Aaron Woods, Senate District 13
The Honorable Rob Wagner, Senate District 19
The Honorable Mark Meek, Senate District 20
The Honorable Kathleen Taylor, Senate District 21
The Honorable Kayse Jama, Senate District 24

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The Honorable Daniel Bonham, Senate District 26
The Honorable Rick Lewis, House District 18
The Honorable Courtney Neron, House District 26
The Honorable Jules Walters, House District 37
The Honorable Daniel Nguyen, House District 38
The Honorable Janelle Bynum, House District 39
The Honorable Annessa Hartman, House District 40
The Honorable Mark Gamba, House District 41
The Honorable Hoa Nguyen, House District 48
The Honorable James Hieb, House District 51
The Honorable Jeff Helfrich, House District 52