

February 20, 2025

The Honorable Floyd Prozanski
Chair, Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee
State Senator
900 Court St. NE S-413
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Senator Prozanski and members of the Committee,

As the leaders of Lane County's public defense providers and the Lane County District Attorney, we are writing to jointly request your support for the Chief Justice's request for two new judicial officers for the 2nd Judicial District (Lane County Circuit Court). This increase would reflect the growth of our community over the past forty years and would allow our criminal justice system to provide better service to the citizens of Lane County.

Thoroughly litigating a criminal case is a time-intensive effort for both the prosecution and the defense. The stakes are high, the evidence can be voluminous, and justice requires careful and thorough research and investigation by the attorneys. By the time cases end up in court, the attorneys have invested a significant amount of time in preparing the case. The resulting litigation can be complex and lengthy. This has become even more true over time, with changes in the system such as the introduction of body-worn cameras and a worsening behavioral health crisis.

While we know that the bench in Lane County does its best to give each criminal case the time it deserves, we also know that because it has the same number of judges in 2025 as it did in 1984, criminal litigation in Lane County always takes place under the shadow of time constraints. Adding two judges in this county would allow the lawyers in our offices to present cases in a way that appropriately balances the need for efficiency with the need for careful consideration. Both individuals charged with crimes and those affected by crime deserve as much.

Moreover, funding for new judges will help Lane County's current bench continue the innovative work that Lane County Circuit Court has been known for. Each of our offices is deeply invested in the continued success of our treatment courts and recognizes that Lane County has been a leader in this area. Lane County Circuit Court's Treatment Court was one of the first substance abuse treatment courts in the United States. Our community also benefits from specialty courts for veterans, juveniles, and the mentally ill. Substance use and behavioral health issues in our community continue to be primary areas of concern for all of us, and collaborative programs like treatment courts are essential to being proactive in addressing these needs. We all have an interest in keeping people out of the criminal justice system, and treatment courts are an essential tool for doing so.

Our judges also have the expertise to create new, innovative programs to address our community's problems. But without your investment in the right-sizing of the Lane County bench, they won't even be able to continue to do their current work, much less add to their workload. This would be a lost opportunity for the health and well-being of our community.

The community is also well-served by ensuring that Lane County continues to avoid an unrepresented persons crisis. Our judges and attorneys have worked together to stave off the worst of the crisis in criminal cases. But we also know that Lane County is not immune to future problems. Adding to our bench would help ensure that we are able to process cases efficiently and fairly to avoid future backlogs.

Please consider Lane County's request for two new judges. Your investment will be the deciding factor in whether our community is not only able to maintain our current level of judicial services but also increase services designed to address our rising issues surrounding housing, substance use, and behavioral health. The attorneys in our offices are dedicated to the populations they serve and to a fair and well-functioning criminal justice system. We know that our bench shares that dedication. Please enable the Lane County bench to meet the needs of our growing community so that we can all work together to serve the citizens of Lane County.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Gougé
Administrator
Lane County Defense Consortium



Christopher Parosa
District Attorney
Lane County District Attorney's Office



Caitlin Plummer
Executive Director
Public Defender Services of Lane County