



To: Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: Hon. Matthew Galli, President
Oregon Circuit Court Judges Association

Date: February 24, 2025

Re: SB 96 – Testimony in Support – Judicial Compensation

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

Thank you, I am Josephine County Circuit Court Judge Matthew Galli, President of the Oregon Circuit Court Judges Association. The OCCJA is the non-profit organization representing the nearly 200 circuit court judges in Oregon on legislative matters including compensation. SB 96 is needed in bringing judicial compensation to an equitable level with the other senior lawyer positions in our state and other state court judge compensation in the Western United States. The Oregon Legislature approves budgets providing salaries that far exceed current judicial compensation for public sector attorney positions. Within our own judicial branch, the legislature has approved budgets allowing for salaries far exceeding judicial compensation for attorney and non-attorney positions. The folks in those positions come and go from work with a fair amount of anonymity without worry of retribution for the everyday decisions made in the workplace. This is not so for circuit court judges. People in our smaller communities know who their judge is. They know our names, they know our faces, they know our voice. If it please the committee, I would like to play a part of the record of an everyday arraignment I presided over a short time ago. The gentleman you hear was in custody on a misdemeanor matter and I was making the release decision.

(play recording – transcript attached)

This was a single occurrence however it represents circumstances replayed in our courts on a regular basis. Every judge has similar experiences.

If we expect to attract talented lawyers with the experience and wisdom needed to manage this type of situation, our specialty treatment courts, the evolving mental health crisis and the varied dockets ranging from criminal to complex civil litigation, compensation for Oregon judges needs to be addressed.

In 2019 there were 2 open judicial seats in my judicial district. With no acceptable candidates available for appointment, the law requiring any applicant to reside or have their primary place of business within that judicial district had to be amended to allow attorneys from adjacent counties to apply. Only then were we able to find two candidates to fill the two positions. This circumstance is not an outlier but fairly common.

Attorneys contemplating moving to the bench do not do it for the money. However, in order to attract the competent members of the bar that we need for our judicial system to maintain its integrity, the sacrifice versus compensation must be reasonable. You will see from the OJD 1 pager submitted to you, the sacrifice versus compensation is becoming harder to justify. There must be some level of equity with other public sector jobs in our state and with state court judicial compensation across the western states.

Members of Judiciary it is critical to the integrity of the judicial branch that this issue be addressed before it becomes a crisis. Since 2016 we have lost two thirds of our most experienced judges, regularly to better paying opportunities.

I have no doubt many of us in both the judicial and legislative branches were looking forward to the compensation commission to be enabled to address the financial shortcomings we are currently enduring. The voters rejected that option. The responsibility to remedy Judicial compensation falls to you and it needs to be addressed now. The cost of this bill is not unduly burdensome and if this was for a different public-sector position would likely be part of a budget readily passed. On behalf of the members of the Circuit Court Judges Association, appellate judges and Supreme Court Justices I implore you to please get this done.

I, of course, will take any questions you may have and, again, on behalf of all circuit court judges, we thank you for your careful consideration of this legislation.

Thank you,

Matthew Galli, OCCJA President