



SIXTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

MORROW & UMATILLA COUNTY CIRCUIT COURTS

216 SE 4th STREET

PENDLETON, OR 97801

541-278-0341

Email: 6th.district@ojd.state.or.us

HON. DANIEL J. HILL
Presiding Judge

IRMA SOLIS
Acting Trial Court Administrator

February 19, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: Co-Chairs Evans and Broadman and Members of the Public Safety Subcommittee of Ways and Means

RE: HB 5012 - Umatilla County request for Courthouse Construction Funds

Co-Chairs and Members of the Subcommittee;

It is a pleasure to address the Subcommittee regarding the funding request in the Chief Justice's budget to provide funds in the amount of \$95 million for a new Courthouse for Umatilla County. My purpose is to describe the need and the County will generally outline the ways and means.

The 6th Judicial District consists of Umatilla County and Morrow County, three full-service courthouses (Pendleton, Hermiston, and Heppner), and the five judges hearing matters in both counties. In Umatilla County, courthouses are comprised of a 1954 three-courtroom courthouse in Pendleton and a satellite courthouse in Hermiston, a two-courtroom courthouse built in 2005. The request before you for consideration is the approval of construction funds for replace the main courthouse in Pendleton to address the many inadequacies, which cannot be corrected without a full replacement, to allow the courts to carry out court operations adequately and efficiently and fulfil our statutorily mandated duty to the public.

ORS 1.185 (a) states that County shall "Provide suitable and sufficient courtrooms, offices and jury rooms for the court, the judges, other officer and employees of the court and juries in attendance upon the court, and provide maintenance and utilities for those courtrooms, offices and jury rooms". In my capacity as Presiding Judge, I have determined that the courthouse in Pendleton is both unsuitable and insufficient in the provision of the statutorily mandated space. Further, it was determined that during the pandemic the courthouse was entirely inadequate to accommodate restrictions such as social distancing.

Unsuitable and insufficient jury assembly space is a regular struggle. While the County works hard to coordinate with courts, a dual use room with competing priorities as our jury assembly space is unsuitable at best. The court is unable to properly plan for jury trials if not in control of a designated suitable and sufficient jury assembly space. Suitable and sufficient jury assembly and deliberation space must accommodate any sudden pandemic restrictions, which is not currently

met and cannot be corrected in the current building.

Courtroom layouts and existing space is unsuitable and insufficient in many ways. Jury boxes do not accommodate alternate jurors for multi-day trials. Gallery space, even in the largest of the courtrooms, does not allow for pandemic spacing requirements, which greatly reduces the seating capacity to hold only approximately 18 persons, including the judge, staff, litigants, and jury, with other parties appearing remotely and spectators needing alternative accommodations. Courtroom space is not adequate for multiple-party presentations (more than two parties), such as dependency hearings.

Sounds insulation coupled with location of jury rooms and holding cells create the issue of in-custody defendants being able to hear what is being discussed both in the hallway and in the jury room, while we try our best to mitigate risk, this is unsuitable and not easily remedied in the current courthouse.

Court office and courtroom HVAC and lighting functionality is generally poor, which negatively impact judges, court staff, court users, and juries attending upon court.

ADA accessibility cannot be adequately met in the current courthouse, leaving judges and court staff with nonexistent ADA accommodations and limited capability to accommodate for the public. The single antiquated elevator provides handicap access to all floors of the courthouse as well as freight access. However, when this elevator is inoperable, court staff must bring services to the courthouse lobby on the first floor for those who cannot use the stairs to access court services, creating vulnerabilities to the safety of court staff.

The isolation of judges' chambers to remote corners of the courthouse, do not allow judges to move from one chamber to another without crossing the public hallway. This discourages judicial interaction which is one of the most important facets of judicial work.

Parking for judges, court staff, and jurors are in unsecured areas requiring movement from vehicles to courthouse in highly visible areas, which has been a topic of concern by courts and juries alike. Concern with personal safety for jurors serving in high profile cases as well as judges and court staff are palpable, as they are exposed to possible scrutiny, photography, and harassment. This fear is amplified when persons are leaving the courthouse in the dark.

The most egregious problems are the lack of separate circulation paths for judges, court staff, in custody defendants, and the public. To access court secured areas such as chambers, courtrooms, and court office spaces, the judges and court staff must use the public elevator/stairs and hallways. Holding cells are in the public hallway which opens the way for opposing parties to the case and members of the public to have view of the transported defendant. In addition to the location of the holding cell is the increased risk created by transporting in-custody defendants. The courthouse sits several miles from the county jail, transporting defendants in complex and dangerous cases certainly bring absolute, actual, and present danger to everyone.

Included as attachments are courthouse rankings for adequacy taken in 2008, Pendleton then at 25th overall (out of 48 courthouses), has only worsened. I have also included photographs to showcase the inadequacy of the court spaces as they currently stand and court statistics to reflect our growing need for suitable and sufficient court space.

I thank the Subcommittee for its hard work in assessing need across the State for use of the State's limited resources and assure the Subcommittee that this is a true need to address issues our region and provide the critical judicial services that the people of Umatilla County need and deserve.

Submitted:



Daniel J. Hill, Circuit Court Judge

DANIEL J. HILL
PRESIDING JUDGE

Attachment:

- Umatilla County Circuit Courthouse – Pendleton (*supporting tables, charts, and photographs*)



UMATILLA COUNTY CIRCUIT COURTHOUSE - PENDLETON

UNSUITABLE AND INSUFFICIENT

ABSTRACT

The information contained within is to be used as an attachment to the Presiding Judge's support letter in favor of HB 5012, with the goal of securing construction funds to replace the current main courthouse in Umatilla County located in Pendleton, Oregon. Courthouse ranking data, photographs of inadequacies, and caseload counts, gathered to reflect our growing need.

Irma Solis

Trial Court Administrator

Ranking

The Courthouse located at 216 SE 4th Street, Pendleton, OR is ranked 25th overall, out of 48 courthouses based on a 2008 study. In the last 17 years this has only worsened. Below are two tables one depicting the ranking of the courthouse, while the second table depicts the cost to bring to standard. The dollar amount to bring to standard is reflective of costs in 2009, with many of these costs increasing significantly now in 2025. However, it is impossible to make the necessary corrections in the current location and the need for space is only increasing. We must plan for a courthouse that is forward thinking and can adapt to the impending growth of this county.

Ranking/2008 – 25th (Pendleton) and 6th (Hermiston annex)

| Facility (of 48) | Overall | ADA | Security | Life Safety | Facility Improvements |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Courthouse | 25 th | 39 th | 36 th | 34 th | 15 th |
| Stafford Hansell | 6 th | 7 th | 6 th | 6 th | 6 th |

Evaluation against 2009 report – Overall rating of 3.42 with projected \$20 million cost to bring to standard:

| Facility | Overall Rating | Overall Cost | ADA Rating | ADA Cost | Security Rating | Security Cost | Life Safety Rating | Life Safety Cost | Improvement Rating | Improvement Cost |
|------------------|----------------|--------------|------------|----------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Courthouse | 3.42 | \$20.0m | 2.9 | \$1.1m | 2.8 | \$6.0m | 2.3 | \$1.8m | 4.0 | \$11.1m |
| Stafford Hansell | 4.44 | \$2.5m | 4.4 | \$0.1m | 4.2 | \$1.4m | 5.0 | \$0 | 4.6 | \$1.0m |

To follow are the photographs of the courthouses. Pendleton courthouse photos show the interior of the building and showcase inefficiencies discussed in the Presiding Judge’s support letter. For reference and placement only, is a photograph of the satellite location of the satellite courthouse located in Hermiston, OR.

Immediately after the photos are statistic tables and a chart to depict the caseload trends this district has experienced in the last several years.

Photos



Figure 1: Umatilla County Circuit Courthouse - Pendleton (circa 1956?)



Figure 2: Umatilla County Court House - Pendleton (2012)



Figure 3: Umatilla County Courthouse Clock Tower - Pendleton (2012)



Figure 4: Pendleton Main Hallway – Facing Courtroom 1 and AIC Cell. Yellow star is Staff Breakroom. Red star is holding cell. Green arrow is judge access to chambers. Blue arrow is staff access to secure office space, directly across the hall from holding cell.

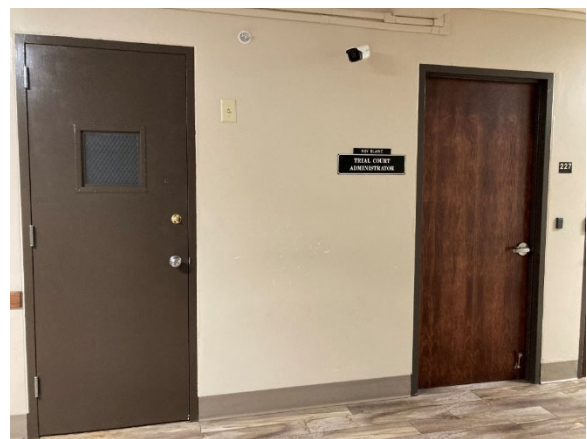


Figure 5: AIC Cell and the former TCA office (now Staff Break Room) in the Hallway



Figure 6: Hallway - View from in front of holding cell looking toward the public entrance located 3 doors down on the right and Courtroom 2 at the end of the hallway straight ahead.



Figure 7: Courtroom #3



Figure 8: Jury Room in Courtroom #2



Figure 9: Courtroom #3 - Note beam with green post obstructing the view of spectators/defendants seated in the spectator benches.



Figure 10: Stafford Hansell Government Center At Hermiston

Tables and Charts

| UMA Cases Filed by Year and Case Type | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
| Civil | 1896 | 1959 | 1898 | 2150 | 2184 |
| Criminal | 6538 | 6239 | 5220 | 7845 | 9479 |
| Dom Rel | 694 | 762 | 781 | 889 | 872 |
| Other | 533 | 601 | 591 | 560 | 571 |
| Totals | 9,661 | 9,561 | 8,490 | 11,444 | 13,106 |

| Growth From Year to Year | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| | 2020 | 2021 | change | 2022 | change | 2023 | change | 2024 | change |
| Civil | 1896 | 1959 | 3% | 1898 | -3% | 2150 | 13% | 2184 | 2% |
| Criminal | 6538 | 6239 | -5% | 5220 | -16% | 7845 | 50% | 9479 | 21% |
| Dom Rel | 694 | 762 | 10% | 781 | 2% | 889 | 14% | 872 | -2% |
| Other | 533 | 601 | 13% | 591 | -2% | 560 | -5% | 571 | 2% |

