

Dear Co-Chairs Broadman and Evans, and Joint Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee Members,

I am writing in support of HB 5012. I also encourage you to increase the amount appropriated to County law libraries in section 7 to \$11.5 million and change the distribution to be decided by the Chief Justice in consultation with Oregon's county law librarians. This would allow county law libraries to maintain current service levels after over a decade of underfunding.

County law libraries fill in the gaps to provide access to legal information and resources for people who cannot get legal aid or afford to hire an attorney. County law libraries allow them to access the same legal information resources as lawyers and provide professional law librarians who can help them navigate those resources.

In 2011 the state legislature took over funding of county law libraries and included that as a pass-through in the OJD budget. The appropriation remained unchanged until FY 2023-25. However, personnel costs have increased since 2011. Resource costs such as online legal research databases have also gone up significantly. Oregon's county law libraries cannot maintain their current level of operations without a significant infusion to match the increased costs of operations.

What distinguishes Oregon's county law libraries from any other service that provides legal assistance is they don't turn anyone away. Other programs have limited capacity and require users to meet certain eligibility criteria based on income, jurisdiction, or subject matter. Anyone can use a county law library for any reason.

When I worked at the Washington County Law Library I helped patrons dealing with matters in federal courts in Oregon, San Diego, and Boston; patrons trying to write a will or deal with the death of a family member (in Oregon or other states); patrons trying to start a business; patrons who had issues with their tenants, their landlord, or their neighbors; patrons helping a family member in jail or prison; patrons who had been released from jail or prison; patrons who knew they needed a lawyer but didn't even know where to start; and solo or small firm lawyers who needed access to broader resources than they had in their office.

Without additional funding county law libraries will have to reduce staffing, hours, and resources. The people most impacted by this will be the people who are unable to afford an attorney and will have no other place to go.

Please help maintain Oregon's county law library services by increasing the appropriation to county law libraries and allowing county law librarians to work with the Chief Justice to ensure effective distribution of the funds.

Thank you,

Lee Van Duzer, JD, MLS

Resident and former Law Library Manager, Washington County