



**WASHINGTON COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT**

**March 20, 2025**

Courthouse  
150 North First Avenue  
Hillsboro, OR 97124

**Chair Kropf, Vice Chairs Chotzen and Wallen, and Members of the Committee:**

Thank you for listening to my oral testimony earlier this week in support of HB 3180. I know you have heard about the numerous issues with the current Washington County Circuit Court facilities. With one portion of the main complex dating back to 1912, the main courthouse completed in 1928, and the connected Justice Services Building dating to 1971, all the main court facilities are old and difficult to navigate. We also have courtrooms across the street in a Juvenile Services Building and nearby at the Law Enforcement Center to include a courtroom currently being built.

The main portion of the Washington County Circuit Court dating to the early 1900s is the portion that will pull away from the other side and collapse in a major earthquake. This is where my courtroom and most of our courtrooms are located. It is also the side with the only wheelchair ramp and entry to the buildings and the one wheelchair lift. A person who is wheelchair bound can most certainly expect to be unable to make it to the counsel tables in most of our courtrooms, much less a witness stand or jury box.

There is a lack of private space for attorneys and clients to talk. Shared corridors mean that defendants and victims come face to face all too regularly and that jurors end up seeing a defendant in shackles by accident – something that resulted in two mistrials in the past year alone.

In general, our courtrooms are often too small or not equipped to handle felony or major civil trials, lacking a 12-person jury space and jury room. The two juvenile courtrooms and two courtrooms at LEC are not equipped for juries. We have a hearings room that is utilized by 20+ unpaid volunteer pro tem judges from our community to hear FEDs, small claims, and contested restraining orders on a daily basis. This space has no jury box, jury room, or chambers. One of our actual

courtrooms only has a 6-person jury box and can only be used for misdemeanors, another has no jury room and is unsuitable for jury trials unless a different jury room happens to be available. With our 16 circuit court judges and 2 hearings referees, this means our 18 judicial officers don't have enough usable space currently. One of our judges is without a courtroom and chambers and we are using a converted jury room as a settlement conference room in order to fully utilize our judicial resources.

As of 2016 OJD workload study results we still need an additional 3 judges to be where we needed to be at that time. Washington County is growing substantially year after year and we are now at over 611,000 people, compared with Multnomah County which now has just over 795,000 people. Yet, Multnomah County has 38 circuit court judges and 53 total judicial officers compared to our total of 18.

Last year our total case filings were up 17.1% over the year before. This included an increase of 23.2% in civil filings, 17.9% in criminal filings, 2.8% in domestic relations filings, and an increase of 25% in our aid and assist filings. In addition, we have added dockets for Conditional Discharge cases and to manage the public defense crisis. We have multiple successful treatment courts as well. All of this takes additional resources, both judicial and staff-wise.

I expect that when we receive the most recent OJD workload study results that are pending, we will need far more than 3 additional judicial positions to get us to where we need to be to adequately serve the Washington County community. Even with creative thinking and continuing to patchwork courtrooms among multiple facilities, I do not see a way to provide courtrooms for the number of judges we need without a new courthouse. Even if we could do so, that does not solve the myriad issues – functionally, safety-related, and security-wise – that our current facilities face.

I regularly have heavy dockets that are far more crowded should be and take far longer than they should. I am not alone. Washington County's Circuit Court Judges have learned to become more and more efficient to accomplish the cases coming before them. There are only two ways to manage the increasing case numbers, becoming more efficient or allowing cases to be delayed longer and longer. Neither serves the people of Washington County properly as it shortened

hearings impact the opportunity to be fully heard and increased delays impact the ability for them to be heard in a timely fashion. It weighs heavily on a daily basis that I cannot give more time to each matter coming before me in court because the people deserve more than what I can give with our current caseloads. The only way to truly fix this is to build a new courthouse. This project needs to begin as soon as possible as costs will only go up and even starting now will not provide immediate relief to the issues we face. The \$1.25 million in matching funds for the Courthouse Replacement Planning Project is the start, however, and I humbly request your support.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Guptill', written over a vertical line that extends from the text below.

Presiding Judge Rebecca Guptill  
Washington County Circuit Court

RDG:jab