

**TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 4043
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
FEBRUARY 4, 2026**

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Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Wallan, Vice-Chair Chotzen, and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) supports HB 4043, which would authorize the State Treasurer to issue Article XI-Q general obligation bonds to finance renovation or expansion of courthouses. Article XI-Q general obligation bonds may currently be used to finance up to 50 percent of the cost of replacing a courthouse, but such bonds may not be used for expansions or renovations.

Many courthouses are nearing, or have long since passed, their life expectancy. Particularly in rural or frontier Oregon, many courthouses were built in the early or mid-1900s. Some of these courthouses are simply too small to handle their current volume of cases. These courts often find themselves in the difficult position of juggling courtrooms between judges and holding court in less-than-ideal locations, like jury assembly rooms. These courts are often understaffed and need additional judges, but they simply do not have the space to house additional personnel. As a result, they face backlogs in their dockets and litigants face delays in accessing the justice courts strive to provide.

Other courthouses are seismically unsound, have leaking roofs, or don't provide access to people with disabilities or places for attorneys to speak privately with their clients. Many courthouses are not designed to provide security screening at a single entry and have such cramped spaces that they end up with people accused of crimes standing in the same hallways as their alleged victims and the witnesses in their cases. In short, they require extensive renovation and/or expansions to meet current standards or become sufficient for modern court technology and services.

Counties are, by statute, responsible for providing "suitable and sufficient" courtrooms, offices, and jury rooms for the court, and to provide maintenance and utilities for those facilities. ORS 1.185. Unfortunately, however, many counties cannot afford to adequately maintain their courthouses, replace unsound courthouses, or build expansions necessary to create the space needed for courthouse operations.

Recognizing this, the state currently provides three kinds of funding support to assist counties with that duty: (a) funding requested for improvements or maintenance from the State Court Facilities and Security Account generally up to about \$2 million; (b) planning funds for counties wanting to replace unsafe courthouses, which typically are General Fund requests up to about \$1.25 million, and (c) Article XI-Q bond construction

matching funds – up to 50 percent of the court portion of a new facility – to replace unsafe courthouses. This last category of construction bond funds can range from several million dollars to more than \$100 million, and under current law are available only for replacing a courthouse.

HB 4043 would add another category to those three types of state funding assistance – using state bonds as matching funds for courthouse expansions and renovations. This would provide a funding alternative for the legislature to support projects that are larger in scale than the current cash-funded improvement projects, but smaller than the full courthouse replacement projects currently supported with state bond funds.

This legislation will give the legislature the options it needs to help ensure our state court facilities are safe and appropriately sized for the work they need to do for our communities. We strongly urge your support of HB 4043.