

February 23, 2017

Dear Sen. Winters,

I am writing as a member of the Citizens' Campaign for Court Funding, a group of business leaders, community leaders and Bar leaders who are concerned about the continued under-funding of one of the three branches of Oregon's government: the courts.

The last few biennia have seen reductions in our state court budgets that have called into question whether the courts can uphold their constitutional duty to administer justice completely and without delay. While the number of judges has not decreased, the clerks and support staff they depend on to make the courts work effectively have been cut substantially.

Courts offer safety for the public in resolving criminal cases, certainty for businesses in disputes with customers, competitors and the government, and resolution to families in crisis. Our constitution and statutes rightly require courts to deal with certain kinds of cases like criminal matters and many juvenile cases before others. Lower priority cases – such as civil disputes – fall to the back and move forward only as permitted by resolution of the cases at the front of the line.

Over the next few months we plan to engage the legislature and the governor in a conversation about the third branch, which has little control over the amount of its budget. We hope for a constructive dialog. We realize that all parts of our state government have to pull together to support education, public safety, and healthcare, but we are convinced that adequate funding for basic court services is a critically important component of that process.

We look forward to talking with you soon about these important issues.

Sincerely,

Michael D. Levelle  
Oregon State Bar President

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