

## Sample Letter to Legislator

Dear Senator /Representative \_\_\_\_\_

I am writing to urge you to support adequate funding for Oregon's courts – a core function of state government and crucial to maintaining a healthy business climate in Oregon. Over the last decade, the judicial branch budget has been significantly reduced. Further cuts will hurt our already weakened court system by limiting access to justice, and could create a "wild west" business climate where resolution of disputes is unpredictable. Effectively, justice delayed becomes justice denied for businesses in Oregon.

Why should the judicial branch budget matter to me as an Oregon business owner? Courts are critical to thousands of Oregon businesses. Healthy courts are part of a thriving business climate: without the assurance that businesses can resolve disputes with customers, competitors and regulators expeditiously through a fair and impartial court system, businesses may locate elsewhere.

During the last economic downturn, Oregon's court system has sustained staggering cuts that led to court closures, staff reductions and furloughs. At the same time, demand for court services increased – driven in part by this same economic downturn. Oregon laid off court reporters, judicial assistants, and referee judges who handle traffic, small claims, and criminal matters. With each cut a "new normal" forms a baseline for further cuts. The "new normal" is not adequate for businesses in Oregon – even without further cuts, Oregon's courts would need increased funding to fulfill their constitutional role to provide justice completely and without delay.

Oregon's courts are more efficient today than in earlier years. Our court system today manages an increasing complex caseload with fewer employees. Like many businesses however, laying off employees and shifting responsibilities creates new difficulties. The docket clerk in the small claims department will need time to get up to speed when assigned an additional probate or criminal caseload. The courts are making do with fewer resources, but there are limits to how thin resources can be stretched.

Oregon's courts must be adequately funded to ensure access to justice to all Oregonians. The public must trust the commitment of its courts to fairness, to the timely and efficient resolution of disputes, and to an open court system accessible to all. Courts ensure public safety, protect vulnerable citizens, and resolve the problems of families in crisis. The court system accepted recent budget cuts with the other branches of government, but it has reached a point where access to justice may no longer exist for businesses or individuals.

Please support adequate funding for the justice system to ensure all citizens of Oregon have access to justice.

Thanks for your consideration of these issues.