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**Testimony before
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Public Safety
In support of House Bill 5012**

April 14, 2021

Co-Chairs Gorsek and Sollman and Members of the
Committee:

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

Oregon Courts have historically struggled to maintain staffing at a level where they can uphold their constitutional duty to administer justice completely and without delay. Even before the pandemic, courts limited their customer service hours. While the number of judges increased due to the legislature's efforts, and the courts have successfully implemented Oregon eCourt, maintaining the clerks and support staff the courts depend on to make our system function remains critical.

Over the past year Oregon has been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, a sudden and extreme recession, and active wildfires burning through many of our communities, all in the midst of a pressing conversation concerning racial justice. Almost every aspect of our judicial system has been challenged by these events. Looking forward, these statewide challenges created an even greater need for a healthy and engaged court system.

Courts offer safety for the public by resolving criminal cases, certainty for businesses and organizations in disputes with customers, competitors and the government, protection for consumers, 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

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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. With the need to minimize health risks, Oregon’s courts experienced additional challenges to provide court services to those in need.

The Oregon Campaign for Court Funding is committed to engaging with the legislature and the governor in a conversation about the budget for our court system. We hope for a constructive dialog. We realize that all parts of our state government have to pull together to support healthcare, public safety, and education, but we are convinced that adequate funding for our court system is a critically important part of our budget that must not be forgotten.

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

Sincerely,

David Wade
OSB Bar President