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LARGE

January 12, 2021

Clackamas County Board of Commissioners
Tootie Smith, Commission Chair
Sonya Fisher, Commissioner
Paul Savas, Commissioner
Martha Schrader, Commissioner
Mark Shull, Commissioner
2051 Kaen Road
Oregon City, OR 97045

Via Email and U.S. Mail

Re: Clackamas County Courthouse Replacement Project

Dear Clackamas County Board of Commissioners:

As we push into the new year, Clackamas County faces many challenges. The Clackamas County Bar Association (“CCBA”) requests that you make the Clackamas County Courthouse Replacement Project a top priority, on behalf of its members, community partners, and the entire county.

Opened while Franklin D. Roosevelt occupied the White House, the current Clackamas County Circuit Courthouse is entering its 85th year of service. I am certain that the Board of Commissioners is well aware that the current courthouse is outdated with myriad shortcomings.

The current courthouse it is outdated, not capable of handling the basic changes in technology that are standard in most courthouses regarding virtual hearings, trials and hearings. There are only two courtrooms in the current courthouse (out of eleven) that can accommodate a 12-person jury panel with an alternate juror. This lack of space is more than just an inconvenience of litigating in Clackamas County; the inability to safely and quickly evacuate in the event of a natural disaster is hard to overstate.

The COVID pandemic and this fall’s wildfires have revealed how the lack of ventilation can cripple productivity and create safety concerns. Seismically, the current courthouse is unsound, and – literally as opposed to figuratively – sliding into the Willamette River. Indeed, the current courthouse is far past its prime. I could go on, and on, and on.

These issues, individually or in the aggregate, require you to replace the current courthouse. However, we bring Clackamas County Courthouse Replacement Project to your attention to address what we see as an acute access to justice problem.

Clackamas County is the third most populous county in the state of Oregon. As one would expect, there is much legal business to be conducted from day to day in the courthouse. Unfortunately, the current courthouse cannot meet the demands of Clackamas County circa 2021. From day to day, the CCBA estimates that anywhere from 30-50% of all civil cases that are otherwise ready for trial are delayed from proceeding. This delay is not due to the inability or unwillingness of the parties, their attorneys, or court-staff; these myriad cases – divorce, adoptions, small-claims, contract disputes, etc. – are delayed because there are not enough judges and courtrooms available in the courthouse. Clackamas County has the land necessary to build a new courthouse, access to funding from the state to minimize the cost to residents of Clackamas County, and the willingness of the CCBA and community partners to lend whatever assistance is required. What Clackamas County now needs is follow-through from the Board of Commissioners to bring the Clackamas County Courthouse Replacement Project to fruition

On behalf of our members, community partners, and the entire county, the CCBA asks the you move forward with the Clackamas County Courthouse Replacement Project so that our county's and our citizen's legal business can be conducted safely and efficiently. If any (or all of you) would like to discuss the Clackamas County Courthouse Replacement Project, or learn more about the issues facing the bench, the bar, and the public at our current courthouse, please do not hesitate to contact me at 503.305.6894, or by email at alec@laidlawandlaidlaw.com.

Sincerely,

/s/ Alec J. Laidlaw

ALEC J. LAIDLAW, PRESIDENT
CLACKAMAS COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

/s/ Rebecca S. Schaleger

REBECCA S. SCHALEGER, ADMINISTRATOR
JUVENILE ADVOCATES OF CLACKAMAS ("JACL")

AJL/

Cc Clackamas County Bar Association Membership
Honorable Kathie F. Steele, Clackamas County Circuit Court Presiding Judge
Gary Schmidt, Clackamas County Administrator