

Senate Bill 600

Expand Access to Justice

Senate Bill 600 would expand access to justice for low-income Oregonians across the state. It would increase funding for community dispute resolution centers and expand legal services to victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Passage of SB 600 will:

- Bolster Oregon's community dispute resolution centers with an additional \$4.98 million in funding to allow the existing network of 15 community dispute resolution centers help more vulnerable families stay in their homes and at-risk students stay in school, and it will expand services to all counties in Oregon.
- Direct an additional \$250,000 to the University of Oregon's Domestic Violence Clinic to hire an additional attorney and legal assistant to enable the clinic to serve more vulnerable survivors of abuse and provide a broader array of much needed holistic legal services.

Domestic Violence Clinic—Expand Access to Justice for Victims and Survivors of Domestic Violence

The Domestic Violence Clinic housed within the University of Oregon School of Law offers legal services to low-income victims and survivors of sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. In addition, the clinic also provides law students an opportunity to learn how to effectively represent clients in civil and criminal legal matters, including protective order proceedings, family law matters, and employment and housing issues. Law students are supervised by faculty members who are licensed attorneys and experienced educators, allowing them to represent clients while learning the tenets of law applicable to the area of practice.

Turning Away Victims in Need

The need for legal services for domestic violence survivors in Lane County is tremendous, and the clinic does not have capacity to serve the high volume of cases referred to it. In 2021, the most recent year for which the full statistics are available, 2,165 protective order cases were filed in Lane County, approximately 200 more than were filed in 2020. In 2022, the primary domestic violence advocacy organization in Lane County, Hope & Safety Alliance, referred almost 150 survivors seeking legal services to the UO Domestic Violence Clinic. Without additional funding, the clinic cannot serve all victims in need.

Lacking Capacity to Meet Clients' Needs

Without access to the breadth of legal services victims need, they often remain in abusive situations because they have no financial resources and nowhere to go. The clinic serves clients who are low income (many have almost no income). The increase in housing costs is placing an additional burden on survivors, making legal services that can help them secure housing stability or access financial support critical in achieving safety. Clients are also often prevented from taking advantage of a good job market due to family or childcare responsibilities, disabilities, or the abuser interfering with or preventing them from working. The clinic needs to be able to provide legal services to help reduce these barriers, including barriers to employment.

An additional \$250,000 would fund the hiring of a full-time staff attorney and a half-time legal assistant. The attorney could supervise up to eight students per semester and provide legal services to approximately 60 additional clients a year, and full representation to 20. This investment would decrease the number of clients the clinic is unable to adequately serve by more than 60 percent.

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Increase Investment in Community Dispute Resolution to Expand Access to Justice

Resolution Centers across the state, supported by the Oregon Office for Community Dispute Resolution (OOCDR) at the University of Oregon, help address some of the most pressing issues facing our communities. They provide effective services that help communities improve graduation rates, reduce crime recidivism rates, resolve disputes faster and cheaper than courts, and keep people housed. These preventative services help reduce community costs for incarceration, health care, associated court costs, and stabilize the housing crisis by keeping Oregonians at risk of foreclosure and eviction housed.

Resolution Centers increase access to justice for all community members. Mediation in the United States was embedded within the 1964 Civil Rights Act to address racial, ethnic, class, and gender inequalities throughout the courts.

Resolution Centers mobilize and train volunteers across the state to become pro bono mediators. Nearly 1,200 dedicated volunteers have served nearly 21,000 volunteer hours and assist more than 51,000 low-income Oregonians in their communities each biennium. This community-based model is equally effective yet lower in cost than traditional legal services.

With an additional \$4.98 million allocation to the Oregon Office of Community Dispute Resolution, Resolution Centers will increase connections with community partners for a more holistic wraparound approach; implement more school programs that



have been shown to reduce truancy and improve graduation outcomes; expand restorative justice programming; and increase education programs for youth and adults. An increased investment will help expand research on innovative practice changes to reduce barriers and increase access to justice.

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