Multnomah County Government Relations

DATE: February 5, 2020
TO: Senate Judiciary Committee
FROM: Taylor Steenblock, Multnomah County
RE: SB 1547, East County Courthouse

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher and members of the committee,

My name is Taylor Steenblock. I am here today from Multnomah County Government Relations to testify in support of SB 1547, specifically section one with the -2 amendments. The language in this section would expand Multnomah County's ability to hear cases the east county courthouse in Gresham.

The East County Courthouse (ECC), which is a joint state-county asset, is currently underutilized. There are some days during the week where no cases are scheduled or heard. We intend to address this and maximize the use of the East County Courthouse by removing statutory barriers to hearing more misdemeanors at the ECC.

Under current state statute, if a defendant has been in custody at any point during their case, the case is required to be heard at the downtown courthouse. This bill would allow all misdemeanors occurring east of 122nd to be heard at the East County Courthouse unless the person is currently in custody at the time of a proceeding, has a warrant, or is charged with a felony case. The lack of a holding cell in the ECC is the reason for the latter constraints, but this is not an issue with misdemeanor cases where the person has been released. It is estimated that as a result of the changes made in section one of this bill, we could potentially see 2500 additional matters in the ECC annually.

By increasing the number of cases heard in Gresham, we can maximize efficiency for both our downtown and east county courthouses. This improves service and convenience for Multnomah County residents, especially our east county residents, and takes some of the pressure off of our highly utilized downtown courthouse. We urge your support for SB 1547 and the -2 amendments.

Thank you for your time.

Taylor Steenblock
Multnomah County Government Relations