

Future Oregon court closures avoided under agreement

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM, Ore. -- Ways and Means co-chairs Senator Margaret Carter and Representative Peter Buckley and Chief Justice Paul De Muniz announced Friday they had reached an agreement that will allow Oregon courtrooms to stay open for the remainder of this biennium.

Rep. Peter Buckley and Senator Margaret Carter said over the past week negotiations between the Judicial Department and the Legislature on the need to cut days led to a solution that means the courts will close only one day -- this Friday.

Chief Justice Paul De Muniz and the co-chairs said the recent negotiations helps pave the way for a new and better relationship between the Judicial Department and the Legislature's budget writing process.

"I am grateful for the ongoing efforts of legislative leaders to limit the impact of budget cuts on Oregon courts and the people served by them," said Oregon Chief Justice Paul De Muniz. "This decision could not have come at a better time." Buckley and Carter were able to reach agreements with De Muniz today that shifts \$1.7 million in previously incurred costs to develop and implement electronic case filing and document management in Oregon appellate courts from General Fund to COP proceeds already sold to fund Oregon eCourt projects.

In exchange, the Judicial Department agreed to submit a detailed plan by March 20 on reaching specific budget reductions required under SB 5552 and to report to the Ways and Means Committee about its eCourt system by April 1, 2009.

Co-Chairs Carter and Buckley praised the work done by the Judicial Department and the Legislative Fiscal Office in crunching the numbers and finding the answers.

"Having your day in court is a fundamental American right," said Carter (D-Portland). "Working together with the Judicial branch we were able to find a shared solution to ensure that Oregonians will continue to have access to the courts and that our state budget difficulties won't deny or delay justice for anyone."

"Just as school districts worked with the Legislature to ensure a full year for students, the Judicial Department has stepped up and made the sacrifices and tough choices necessary for them to stay open the remainder of this budget year," said Buckley (D-Ashland). "Oregonians, your day in court will continue to include Fridays."

Buckley and Carter said they were extremely pleased that courts will not be closed the remainder of this year, and that a better working relationship has been established. Both warned, however, that deeper budget cuts for the next biennium could force Oregon back into the same situation.

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