



Administrative Office of the Courts

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Judicial Branch testimony neither for nor against LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program:

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Julie Finn and I represent the Judicial Branch.

The Judicial Branch takes no position on the merits of LD 1964 and would like to thank the sponsors, cosponsors, and members of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program for working on this important issue.

Our comments are brief and only address the potential impact that the bill as drafted would have on our core functions. On several occasions during this session, representatives of the Judicial Branch have testified before the Judiciary Committee and the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and described the critical staffing shortfalls that we currently face. The Chief Justice portrayed the state of the judiciary as “frail.” The covid-19 pandemic magnified existing struggles to keep up with increasing court filings in some dockets and heightened complexity in others. A significant criminal backlog resulted, and still exists today. To address these issues, the Judicial Branch has made a major biennial budget request to add positions at multiple levels to assist with the backlog.

With this backdrop, even under current law and leave policies, it is difficult to cover extended employee absences. LD 1964 expands paid leave benefits and would create more staffing issues in our courts. Every time a judge sits in a courtroom and presides over a docket, a clerk and a marshal must also be present. When not present in a courtroom, a clerk organizes schedules and files while serving the public in person and over the telephone, and marshals cover entry screening and address numerous safety concerns.

As stated above, the Judicial Branch is neutral with respect to the policy issues but is concerned that the passage of the current draft of LD 1964 would have a negative impact on our operations and ability to manage our courts during this difficult time.

Thank you for your consideration.