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April 10, 2026

Rosanna Wadkins, Superior Court Administrator  
205 W. Kincaid Street, Room 202  
Mount Vernon, Washington 98273

Re: Support for Adoption of New Local Rule 34 and Revisions to Local Rule 30

Dear Superior Court Administrator,

We write to **renew and emphasize our strong support** for the adoption of proposed Local Rule 34 and revisions to Local Rule 30 governing civil fee waivers in Skagit County Superior Court. In light of recent changes to the ex parte calendar and continued barriers faced by indigent civil litigants by the Court's unwritten procedures, prompt adoption of these Rules is now more urgent than ever.

Skagit Legal Aid exclusively serves low-income individuals and families. Our mission is to expand access to the civil justice system for historically underserved communities and to eliminate barriers that perpetuate injustice, poverty, and racial inequity in the Skagit Valley. The current fee waiver process in Skagit County stands in stark contrast to these values and, in practice, imposes unnecessary and inequitable burdens on those least able to navigate them.

Despite clear guidance under GR 34, Skagit County continues to maintain one of the most restrictive and time-intensive fee waiver processes in the state. The recent restructuring of the ex parte calendar by limiting availability and removing predictable access points has only exacerbated these challenges. At the same time, there remains a lack of clear, consistent, and publicly accessible instructions from the Court and Clerk's Office regarding how indigent litigants may request fee waivers. No information about fee waivers is currently available inside the Skagit County Superior Court.

As a result, pro se Skagitonians are routinely required to:

- Travel to the courthouse during limited morning hours to attempt to file a fee waiver request—often without clear guidance or accessible forms;
- Return later the same day (or next day if no ex parte calendar is held) to appear at a 1:15 p.m. ex parte calendar and publicly explain their financial hardship, a process not required by GR 34;
- Immediately file their underlying pleadings following the hearing or risk the fee waiver becoming “stale”, requiring them to repeat the process.

This process is not only inefficient; it is fundamentally inconsistent with the intent of GR 34. It creates avoidable logistical, financial, and dignitary barriers for indigent litigants.

It also discourages pro bono participation by attorneys who must dedicate significant time simply to secure a fee waiver for clients who are already presumptively eligible. Under GR 34(a)(4), individuals represented by Qualified Legal Services Providers (QLSPs), including Skagit Legal Aid and the Northwest Justice Project, are **presumptively indigent** upon certification by counsel. Requiring in-person appearances in these circumstances is unnecessary and inconsistent with statewide court rules.

The proposed rule changes offer a straightforward and practical solution. Adoption of Local Rule 34 and revisions to Local Rule 30 would:

- Align Skagit County practice with GR 34 and statewide standards;
- Allow for electronic filing of fee waiver requests, particularly for QLSP-affiliated attorneys;
- Permit simultaneous filing of fee waivers and underlying pleadings, reducing unnecessary courthouse visits;
- Provide clear, accessible forms and procedures consistent with those developed by the Administrative Office of the Courts;
- Eliminate the need for in-person ex parte appearances that impose unnecessary burdens and create barriers to justice.

**Simply put, the current system places undue obstacles in front of those seeking access to the Skagit County Superior Court. It requires individuals to navigate a process that is confusing, time-consuming, and, at times, humiliating.** We respectfully urge the Court to prioritize and adopt these long-pending rule changes. Doing so would represent a meaningful step toward ensuring that access to justice in Skagit County is not conditioned on a person's ability to navigate procedural barriers or take time away from work, childcare, or transportation constraints.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued service to our community.

Sincerely Yours,

Andrew Dugan  
Executive Director, Skagit Legal Aid

Gail Smith  
Chair, Skagit Legal Aid

Josefina Cerrillo-Ramirez  
Managing Attorney, Northwest Justice Project Bellingham and Mount Vernon Field Offices  
Board Member, Skagit Legal Aid