

# ODOT:

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tor for ODOT in Pendleton, was responding to a stuck snowplow in the area when she came across Miller and gave him a ride home to Milton-Freewater.

"I was real surprised when she said, 'Oh, you know it's closed,'" he said.

The next morning, snow had buried Miller's car to its roofline.

"It was buried for four days and we couldn't find it," Miller said.

## Conditions among worst in 28 years

While Miller returned a week later to dig out his belongings from the car, it was not until Wednesday, Jan. 26, that he was able to free his vehicle. Miller said he spent several days digging and received some help from passing motorists as he tried to free the car in the weeks since.

"I hate even thinking about what we would've found the following day had she not gotten to that car," said Robert Cash, ODOT transportation maintenance manager in Pendleton.

Berheim, said road conditions the night of Jan. 2-3, were among the worst she had seen in her 28 years with the department. High winds and heavy snowfall resulted in snow drifts several feet high and obscured visibility.

"It was almost the whole length of Highway 11," she



A road closed sign on Jan. 3, 2022, blocks access to Spring Hollow Road at its intersection with Highway 11 in Adams.

said. "I've seen it probably that bad around the Athena area, but I've never seen it go from one end to the other."

According to Tom Strandberg, ODOT Region 5 public information officer, the department reported more than 20 abandoned or stuck vehicles and tow trucks were brought in the following day to help clear the road so snow removal could resume.

"We were worried sick about what we would find the following day with all of those vehicles that weren't following the road closure," Cash said.

Cash said the high wind speeds meant plow operators were forced to plow into the wind, putting them against the road's direction of travel. He added this practice is usually not a problem when

the roads are closed, but the number of people ignoring the closure meant plows would have to stop and back up to allow for oncoming traffic.

"Generally speaking in the evenings and wee hours of the night we don't have a lot of traffic and most of the traffic we do have is locals who understand the closures — that night it just seemed like we had a nonstop parade of

Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

vehicles," Cash said.

The road closure, which began at roughly 4:45 p.m. and lasted 24 hours, came about as high winds and heavy snowfall made it too dangerous for ODOT employees to maintain the road to safe conditions, according to the department.

"We closed the highway and started putting signs out," Cash said. "Once we got the

closures put up, I told my crew that we were going to get off of that section of road."

## Follow road closures to stay safe

Cash urged people to obey road closure signs where posted and check tripcheck.com frequently when inclement weather arrives.

While ODOT was struggling with staffing shortages heading into the winter months, Cash said more people would not necessarily have helped reopen the highway any quicker, but rather equipment limitations were a more prominent concern.

"Our resources are so thin," he said. "We have 450 lane miles to take care of with five snowplows."

In addition to plow concerns, Cash said the depth of some of the snowdrifts necessitated bringing in snowblowers from Elgin, Meacham and Bend to help clear the highway completely.

"Just being able to get enough equipment in to open up the highway as quick as possible was a challenge," he said. "That all took time."

ODOT encouraged drivers to be cognizant of road conditions and be prepared for inclement weather when traveling in the winter months. Berheim advised drivers thinking of going past road closures to think about the consequences of their actions on their safety and the safety of those working.

"They're putting themselves at risk," she said. "And anyone who has to go retrieve them."

# Paralegals:

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same survey found 84.2% of people who needed a lawyer were unable to obtain one.

Similarly, Oregon Judicial Department case count data shows between 2016 and 2021, more than 83% of all parties in landlord/tenant cases had no attorney. In dissolution cases 71% were unrepresented. In other domestic relations cases 55% were unrepresented.

"The biggest benefit will be in the area of family law because that's where the greatest demand is," Harris said. "Right now, we have so many people coming to the courthouse who are just doing their very best to try and fill out these forms correctly, and it just puts a huge burden on the courthouse staff to reject a form and tell them to go back and do it right."

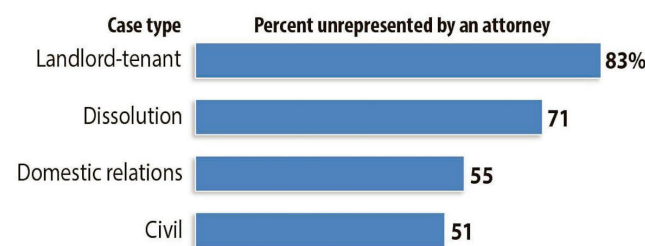
The Bar has received responses to the proposal through its public comment portal, and the general consensus aligns with the PSU survey data, showing a number of residents support the proposition and cite the high-cost barrier of entry to legal matters as a principal cause.

Those who identified as lawyers, however, were a mixed bag.

Although nearly all of the respondents acknowledged the dearth of services for low income residents seeking legal aid, some expressed concern that licensed paralegals acting as a lawyer would be akin to a nurse practitioner performing surgery. Others took excep-

## Unrepresented cases in Oregon, 2016-21

The Oregon State Bar is working to add a new level of paralegal staff capable of assisting residents with landlord-tenant and family law cases.



Source: Oregon Judicial Department

The Bulletin graphic

tion with the paltry experience required to become a licensed paralegal.

"Looking at the admissions framework recommendations, a paralegal would only need 500 hours of experience working in the family law arena to become a licensed paraprofessional in family law," Jo Posey, a family law specialist in Portland with Posey Law Inc., said in a public hearing regarding the paralegal program. "That is the equivalent of just over three

months of full-time work at a family law firm, and it is simply not enough time for a paralegal to gain the knowledge and skill required to evaluate the scope of potential family law representation, let alone to provide effective legal advice."

Shortages of attorneys long have plagued rural areas. Harris said that is a gap paralegals also can help cover.

"I think especially in rural areas," he said, "this is going to be a real benefit."

# WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH GET VACCINATED.

COVID fatigue is the biggest threat to keeping Oregon schools open and kids safe this winter. But, getting vaccinated is just one of 11 health and safety measures we can take to protect what's most important. Find out more at [Oregon.gov/readyschools](https://Oregon.gov/readyschools).



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