
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

February 19, 2020

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

As the state's leading political voice for reproductive health care, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon is proud to be part of the Fair Shot for All coalition, a unique partnership of more than 30 community-based organizations and labor unions who came together in 2014 to advance racial, gender and economic justice in Oregon. Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon urges strong support for HB 4004, which is a good initial step toward larger reforms that will more robustly address the issues highlighted in the 2019 Sixth Amendment Center report "[The Right to Counsel in Oregon: Evaluation of Trial Level Public Defense Representation Provided Through the Office of Public Defense Services.](#)" We thank the Speaker and the Judiciary committee for their continued support for reforming public defense.

We stand with our reproductive justice partners who have long proclaimed that the fight for justice and equity does not end with having the right to make reproductive and sexual health decisions; that fight must include advocating for people to have the power and resources necessary to raise and support their families in safe environments and healthy communities, with equitable access to justice, education, and opportunity. The number of women imprisoned in the Oregon Department of Corrections has nearly tripled over the past 20 years despite the fact that women are not committing more frequent or serious crimes.¹ One driver of these increased rates of incarceration is changes in sentencing laws, related to certain drug and property crimes, which have disproportionately impacted women of color.² What's more, justice-involved women have often experienced childhood victimization, family violence, unhealthy relationships, unsafe housing, and are of low socioeconomic status.³ Depriving these women of adequate legal representation further perpetuates these cycles of structural discrimination and marginalization. Right now, Oregon's criminal justice system is broken, and in order to ensure justice for every Oregonian who enters the courtroom, we must make steps to reform Oregon's public defense system. Until important steps are taken to address the inequalities in our community, we will continue to place additional economic burdens on family members, especially women, which can keep families in poverty for generations.

House Bill 4004 is a good initial step toward much-needed larger reform. It puts into statute the abolishment of flat rate case contracting, which the Sixth Amendment Center called unconstitutional in the way it pitted a client's right to adequate representation against the attorney's financial need to take on higher caseloads than what is reasonable. The bill also builds caseload and workload models that take regional needs and best practices into consideration and establishes more transparency and accountability for contractors and OPDS. It also works to ensure that we are including the perspectives of those most impacted by adding a position to the Commission that will be filled by a person who has been formerly represented by a public defense services provider. We respectfully urge your support for HB 4004.

Sincerely,

Emily McLain
Executive Director
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

¹ <https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/crime/2017/02/16/oregon-faces-skyrocketing-female-prison-population/98012786/>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.