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House Judiciary Committee
Re: HB 2672 with the -1 Amendments

I am writing to support HB 2672 with the -1 amendment that provides for loan forgiveness for graduates of all three Oregon law schools who work as public defenders in Oregon for at least 5 years following graduation. It is well known that Oregon faces a crisis of constitutional magnitude in our public defense system. We must provide and retain more public defenders in Oregon.

As noted below, over the past 4 years, 39 Lewis and Clark Law School graduates have become public defenders and all but 2, Oregon public defenders:

For the class of 2022: 13/176 (7.4%) (2 are practicing in rural WA.)
For the class of 2021: 10/175 (5.7%)
For the class of 2020: 8/170 (4.7%)
For the class of 2019: 8/174 (4.6%)

With the relatively low pay in this field, however, it is most difficult for these graduates to remain in their chosen field. Obviously, mandating higher pay in line with county prosecutors would significantly help this situation, but loan forgiveness would go a long way towards retaining experienced attorneys as public defenders and encouraging more graduates to join their ranks.

I note that the bill in its current form also provides loan forgiveness for county prosecutors. I was unaware that Oregon had an issue with attracting and retaining prosecutors, but would need more information before supporting that portion of the bill. We can all agree, however, that least for public defenders, action is needed and very soon and HB 2672-1 is a good start.

Very best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer J. Johnson".

Jennifer J. Johnson
Dean and Erskine Wood Sr. Professor of Law