

# Danielle J. O'Brien

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Sen. Floyd Prozanski  
Rep. Paul Evans  
Rep. Kim Wallan  
Sen. Dennis Linthicum

Re: Opposition to SB 337

Dear Sen. Prozanski, Rep. Evans, Rep. Wallan, and Sen. Linthicum,

I am an attorney with the Juvenile Defenders of Linn County. Prior to working in Linn County, I was part of the defense consortium in Benton County and before that I handled conflict cases in various counties including Lane, Douglas, Josephine, Jackson, Coos, Curry and Lincoln counties. I have been both an independent contractor with the State and part of two different consortiums and I have been doing this work for almost 17 years. I can say without qualification the consortia model is not the problem with public defense in the State of Oregon, and without consortia it will be functionally impossible for families and children who are involved in the dependency and delinquency systems to receive adequate, effective legal counsel.

Last year our group needed to hire a new attorney to meet rising caseloads – we had one applicant. The issue is not the work we do or doing it within the framework of a consortium. The issue is a shortage of attorneys who are willing to do the work. The lack of attorneys wanting to do the work can be attributed to several things: high caseloads, lack of pay parity, no benefits and no protections, no training or encouragement for juvenile lawyers in law schools, no efforts to recruit lawyers into the field through a training model, and more – but none of it is attributable to the consortia model.

We are skilled attorneys who take our job seriously. We advocate for clients who are facing some of the most difficult things they've ever experienced – having their children taken from them by the State or being placed in foster care with little to no explanation.

A number of other juvenile law attorneys have shared their testimony and I urge you to consider all of them. Tahra Sinks from Marion County has written a particularly thorough statement which addresses the reasons for consortia and the specific kind of work we do. My colleagues in Linn County have also all written statements. We've all done this with the common goal of urging you to reject SB337, because it will hurt Oregon families. It will further harm the most disenfranchised parts of our communities, those who need our help the most. And for those of us who have chosen to do this work, that is an outcome we can't stand silently and watch.

If you have any questions, I too would be happy to be a resource.

Sincerely,

*/s/Danielle J. O'Brien*

Danielle O'Brien

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