



To: Senate Committee on Judiciary
RE: Support of SB 337
Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB 337 to improve Oregon's public defense infrastructure for all Oregonians seeking access to fair and just representation and due process within the criminal legal system.

My name is Sol Mora and I am the Advocacy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC). We are an alliance of culturally specific community-based organizations dedicated to cross-cultural collective action for racial justice. CCC strives to address institutional racism and economic disparities within our local and state systems and create viable pathways for communities of color, immigrants, and refugees to obtain self-determination, justice, and access to opportunities.

Part of this work entails examining Oregon's criminal legal system and the ways that communities of color are disproportionately arrested and convicted at higher rates than white Oregonians, due to harmful, racialized stereotypes and narratives about people of color and deep-rooted racism within the overall system, from how people of color are treated to the barriers that make legal resources difficult to access. Implicit bias and racialized stereotypes have a detrimental impact on people of color as oftentimes those who have power within the criminal legal system perceive these individuals as inherently criminal, violent, or unworthy of due process. One example of this is that an estimated 60% of Black Oregonians have a conviction compared to just 17% of white Oregonians; this is not a fluke, but rather a reflection of how the system was designed and the barriers that people of color are facing everyday.

Oregon's public defense infrastructure has been underfunded for decades, and the impact is long-lasting for individuals and communities who rely on public defense services and are not able to access quality services or whose case becomes a part of the growing backlog, forcing them to make the difficult decision to accept plea bargains, rather than moving through due process. There are many other factors that can affect someone's inability to hire a private attorney, like being low-income or working-class, being a young person, being a single parent, and so on. We believe our state has the responsibility to routinely evaluate how we can create a more responsive, accessible, equitable, and anti-racist public defense system. CCC supports SB 337 because it creates an opportunity for the Public Defense Services Commission to study and improve how public defense services operate and are accessed by the communities who are most impacted.

To best make future policy decisions and investments in public defense, the State Legislature must be equipped with the tools, research, and recommendations to do so. On behalf of CCC, we ask that you advance SB 337 to ensure Oregon can review the structural issues that exist within public defense and build upon current progress in future sessions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sol Mora (she/her)
Advocacy Director