



March 31, 2023

Chairs Kropf and Prozanski, and members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of SB 413, SB 337, and HB 2467.**

My name is Alberto Gallegos and I am testifying on behalf of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Oregon. SEIU Oregon is composed of SEIU Local 503 and SEIU Local 49, which together represent over 87,000 people. Local 49 represents private sector janitors, property service workers, light manufacturing, and healthcare workers; while Local 503 represents homecare workers, private nonprofit workers, in-home childcare providers, nursing home workers, and state and local government employees.

Every Oregonian facing criminal charges has a constitutional right to adequate, effective legal counsel, no matter who they are or how much money they have. Unfortunately, hundreds of Oregonians are currently stuck in limbo because the state government has failed to uphold its constitutional responsibility to provide adequate legal counsel to those who can't afford a private attorney. When our public defense system is chronically under-resourced, justice is nearly impossible to achieve. Supporting our public defense system is an integral step toward a more equitable and just Oregon.

The American Bar Association found that Oregon only has about one-third of the public defense attorneys necessary to meet current service needs. To make matters worse, attorneys have cited uncompetitive pay and unwieldy caseloads that hindered their ability to provide adequate representation, causing many to leave the workforce to take private sector or state positions that pay better. This puts Oregonians in need of a public defense attorney in a highly vulnerable state.

This deeply entrenched issue will not be solved by pay rises alone. We must use multiple tools to stabilize, grow and retain our workforce. These bills tackle this issue through increased pay, manageable caseloads and a student loan repayment program. A combination of these tactics will help us attract new attorneys while retaining experienced ones. Reduced caseloads will lead to better representation, reduce errors and prevent burnout and turnover.

SB 413, SB 337, and HB 2467 include important investments and reforms to begin addressing the immediate crisis while building toward a more sustainable and just system which include the following:



Service Employees International Union – Oregon State Council

- HB 2467 and SB 413, focus on workforce recruitment and retention by ensuring pay for providers to be at a commensurate level with state employees who provide similar services
- HB 2467 and SB 413 allow for the Office of Public Defense Services to administer grants to law schools in Oregon for supporting law students working in public defense, establish apprenticeship programs and other recruitment programs. It also allows for the agency to provide grants to contractors of public defense for recruitment of attorneys.
- HB 2467 and SB 413 also establish a loan repayment program through the Oregon State Bar that would allow for attorneys and staff of public defense services in Oregon to apply for grants to cover the costs of student loans during their 10 years of service needed for federal loan forgiveness.

No one in Oregon should face criminal charges without access to an attorney. Together, we can rebuild our public defense system to ensure fairness for all Oregonians. SEIU Oregon strongly urges the House and Senate Judiciary Committees to vote in support of SB 413, SB 337, and HB 2467.

Thank you,

Alberto Gallegos
Political and Government Relations Organizer
SEIU Oregon State Council