

Submitter: Stacey Reding
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

I'm a neighbor and constituent of committee member Khanh Pham. I'm also a supervising attorney at Multnomah Defenders Inc., a nonprofit trial-level public defense provider in downtown Portland. I am writing in support of prioritizing public defense funding to ensure the effective administration of justice and to support public safety across the state.

In the last 3 years, my office has experienced a devastating turnover of criminal trial attorneys. Every time we lose an experienced and knowledgeable trial attorney, our office and our clients suffer. Recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and training a new hire is a huge investment of time, energy and money. Every time we lose an experienced attorney to other areas of law with better pay and a lighter workload, we reduce our office's ability to take on new clients, exacerbating the representation crisis.

The representation crisis harms those facing criminal cases who don't have counsel, who are often our most vulnerable community members. Our criminal justice system disproportionately targets people of color, people living with mental illness, and people living in poverty. The representation crisis also harms the victims of crime whose cases are not being prosecuted, and communities that are affected by crime.

The public defense system in Oregon has been underfunded for many years. Our current crisis has been in the making for decades, and fixing it will take a significant financial investment from our state. Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your hard work on behalf of Oregonians.