



This testimony is on behalf of Multnomah Democrats' Criminal Justice Study Group. We advocate for legislation that promotes equity, fairness and improved policies in public safety, the judiciary system, and imprisonment, and legislation that addresses the root causes of crime.

Everyone knows that a core right in our country is that a public defender will be assigned to every individual arrested for a crime who cannot afford to hire their own lawyer. Therefore, it is unacceptable --basically illegal-- that Oregon is not doing this. It is unacceptable that adequate funding is not provided to those public defenders who are struggling to help their clients, and that because of this, it has been impossible to hire and retain enough experienced lawyers for this essential job. No one should be detained with no public defender available to handle their case, and individuals should also not be released simply because of the public defender shortage. Moreover, it ignores victims' rights when cases are dismissed due to lack of a defense attorney. It is also tremendously costly to tax payers to have setovers in cases and extends the time spent in jail slowing down the criminal justice system.

We do not understand why the State of Oregon has been allowed to get into this untenable situation. Part of the solution is to allocate more money from the General Fund and other allowable sources to public defense. Therefore, **our study group supports passage of SB 5532.**

Also, **we support policy options 101 and 114**, which increase the pay for investigators working on indigent defense. Adequate compensation attracts and retains more investigators, and having more investigators and experienced ones, this allows public defenders to handle more cases.