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DIRECTOR OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

TAX ID # 93-0639815

TO: Joint Committee on Ways & Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

FROM: Sponsors, Inc.

DATE: April 19, 2023

RE: HB 5532, Public Defense Services Commission budget

Sponsors, Inc. is a national leader in the delivery of Reentry services, operating in Lane County. We offer a broad range of services—case management, employment assistance, housing, mental health services and mentoring—that people need in order to be successful upon returning to their community.

This system benefits all Oregonians by ensuring that criminal investigations and trials are conducted in a manner that protects the accused's constitutional rights. The right to counsel ensures that all aspects of the criminal justice system – district attorneys, law enforcement agencies and defense attorneys – are operating on equal footing.

No matter who we are or how much money we have, all Americans have a constitutional right to zealous legal representation. Those who do not have the aid of a lawyer who has the time, ability and resources to present an effective defense are more likely to be unfairly charged, detained and potentially even deported.

But today in Oregon, public defenders are overloaded with cases, meaning many low-income Oregonians who are disproportionately people of color, do not have adequate representation. To protect the constitutional right to a fair trial and the pursuit of justice, Oregon must ensure everyone has equal access to adequate legal representation.



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This legislative session, we have an opportunity to pursue reforms that will create manageable caseloads for public defenders, provide accountability and transparency within the system, and live up to the standard of fairness that our constitution requires. Through these changes, all Oregonians will experience better outcomes from the public defense system.

Without investing in the structural and institutional reforms needed within our public defense system, we will continue to create and exacerbate economic and other barriers for people of color, LGBTQ Oregonians, low-income communities, those experiencing homelessness, and others disproportionately represented in the system.

Access to justice is one of Sponsors cornerstone values, and we support fully funding the Public Defense Services budget and the additional investments in reforms that will allow Oregon to continue on a trajectory that increases access to justice.