

To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety
From: Jana Baker
Date: April 20, 2023
Re: Support for SB 5532 and POPs - Recruitment of Law Students to Public Defense

Co-Chairs Sollman and Evans, and Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety:

My name is Jana Baker. I am a first generation, non-traditional 2nd year law student at Willamette University College of Law. I urge your support of SB 5532 and the POPs that will increase compensation for the entire public defense team (attorneys, investigators, and support staff) so that Oregon can retain and recruit public defense attorneys and investigators and increase capacity with more support staff.

During my undergraduate degree, I had the opportunity to intern with the Josephine County District Attorney's office. When I went to law school, I wanted to be a DA. However, life had a different plan, and led me to interning at a private firm, where I fell in love with criminal defense. I learned that everyone has a story and circumstances beyond the charges they are facing. I also came to realize that a lot of the time the thing that separates "us" from "them" are the choices our parents made.

This year, I have fully immersed myself into the criminal defense world. I am currently a clerk for a post-conviction relief firm, a private criminal defense firm, and I also extern with OCDLA. Finally, I am the president of Willamette's Oregon Criminal Defense Law Student Association (OCDLSA).

In choosing a career path after I graduate from law school, I want to feel like I am making a difference, ensure that justice is balanced, and that my work aligns with my personal values. I want a manageable caseload so that I know I am doing everything I can to represent my clients. In choosing a career that I will want to stay in, compensation and benefits are a deciding factor. Even for me, a true believer in criminal defense, it is scary to enter this field. I often think about how other areas of law are not as emotionally draining, time consuming, and provide higher pay, as I will have impending loans.

POP 101 and POP 114 increase provider compensation and will make public defense a more viable career option when I graduate. Right now, with compensation as low as it is, through my role in OCDLSA, I hear very real concerns from my fellow students who want to work in public defense but do not believe they can support their family doing so. Increasing compensation, commensurate with state employee pay for similar work, can help recruit future public defenders.

POP 102 provides funding for support staff, supervision, and training, which will reduce overall attorney workload and thus, improve case outcomes.

Directing resources to build out an open workload model provides some assurance to those entering public defense that they will not be forced to take on more cases than they can handle, and that they will not be forced to violate ethical rules. This is critical to recruitment as myself and classmates are committed to **not** contributing to the current access to justice problem.

Thank you to the legislature for engaging in conversations on ways to develop the public defense workforce and thank you to this Committee for listening to the law student perspective.

Sincerely,

Jana Baker

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