



OREGON JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT
Office of the State Court Administrator

April 21, 2023
(SENT BY EMAIL)

The Honorable Janeen Sollman, Co-Chair
The Honorable Paul Evans, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Public Safety
900 Court Street NE
H-178 State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301-4048

Re: Public Defense Services Commission Budget, SB 5532

Dear Co-Chair Sollman and Co-Chair Evans,

I am writing to express the Oregon Judicial Department's (OJD) support for SB 5532, the budget for the Public Defense Services Commission (PDSC).

As you know, the Chief Justice sits on the PDSC and has continually expressed support for the PDSC budget, although she is an ex officio, non-voting member and does not have administrative or supervisory authority over the PDSC. She has also asked, and continues to ask, that the Office of the State Court Administrator and Oregon courts do everything possible to ensure that Oregon has a public defense system that provides transparency and accountability, uses accurate and meaningful data, provides appropriate compensation for those who work in the system, and, most importantly, provides quality services to those in need of counsel. OJD remains fully committed to these efforts.

While many necessary steps have been taken – including the recent investments made by the Legislature and the leadership of the Three-Branch Workgroup, we know that there is more to be done. In addition to the systemic changes under consideration, we continue to see far too many Oregonians with a right to counsel remaining unrepresented, and those numbers are growing. Ongoing legislative attention and collaborative problem solving with system stakeholders is critical to resolving this issue.

The lack of available public defense counsel has had myriad and detrimental impacts to the people who do not have a lawyer, as well as to victims/survivors and our broader communities. The unrepresented people remain in legal limbo, victims of crime do not get resolution, and public safety and public confidence in the justice system has eroded. Courts are devoting


extraordinary efforts to these cases, as they navigate not only the public defense shortage but also other gaps and challenges in Oregon's public safety system.

In short, Oregon's criminal legal and public safety systems cannot exist without a strong public defense system. PDSC's work is vital to ensuring that Oregonians' rights and interests are upheld by readily providing qualified counsel for appointment, that the law is being followed, and that courts can provide timely justice for everyone.

As identified by the PDSC, some of the key elements to establishing a healthy public defense system include improving recruitment, retention, and training of attorneys and supporting staff, as well as increasing transparency and accountability. OJD continues to support these efforts and will do what it can to help stabilize and strengthen Oregon's public defense system, which directly affects our communities and Oregon's historically and currently marginalized populations that too often suffer disproportionate outcomes.

OJD is grateful to have the opportunity to submit our support for PDSC's budget. We remain a steadfast partner who is ready and willing to contribute to building a healthy and durable public defense system in Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nancy J. Cozine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nancy" being the most prominent.

Nancy J. Cozine
State Court Administrator

NC:jm/23eNC007jm