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April 21, 2023¹

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

My name is Brook Reinhard. I am the treasurer of Public Defenders of Oregon, and the director of Public Defender Services of Lane County, the non-profit public defender in Eugene. I'm here to support OPDS' budget bill, and to ask for continued funding from the legislature for training and supervision.

Last summer, OPDS funded training and supervision programs at all 10 public defense nonprofits, investing in 28 positions statewide to teach new lawyers and supervise the vital work of representing our clients. This was work we were trying to do already - but because it was never previously funded by the State, we were stretched too thin, and training and supervision always took a back seat to our heavy caseloads. This dedicated funding allowed us to make new investments with focused supervision, hire dedicated trainers, and take the long overdue steps toward reducing turnover.

At my office, the funding provided 3 supervisors and 1 trainer. We spaced this out over 8 attorney positions so that supervisors can still spend the majority of their time directly representing clients. We also divided our 30-attorney office into small groups, with a supervisor on each team for weekly meetings, helping newer attorneys at trial, and investing in weekly trainings.

The approach has yielded fantastic results. In the previous 11-month period, five attorneys had left our office. But after we began our small groups with the training and supervision funding, we've lost only 1 attorney in the last 9 months². Attorneys have had the support to prepare cases with the support of their co-workers, testing the strength of the evidence and their arguments. Ultimately, it's leading to better outcomes for our clients, giving them lawyers who are fully prepared to defend their case in court.

¹ This letter matches testimony given in person on April 19 at the public hearing on the OPDS budget at 3 p.m., with the exception of the footnotes and general information at the end "About PDO"

² A second attorney left our office last fall, but is rejoining as of Monday. The team support and training was a factor in her decision to return.

I've been a public defender for 13 years. People do this work because they care about our clients, and want to treat them as people and not files. Lawyers leave the work when they don't feel supported, when they don't get feedback on how they can do better, and when they see the mistakes they make cost their clients dearly. By continuing to invest in training and supervision, we can keep our existing workforce, and draw new talent into public defense. I talk to a lot of law students and new lawyers about public defense, and the first questions I always get are "what training will I have, and how will I be supervised in the work I do?"

We can substantially grow the supply of public defenders in Oregon. But it is a multi-year investment, and it starts with sustaining the training and supervision investment that began last summer. Thank you for your time, and please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Brook Reinhard
Treasurer, Public Defenders of Oregon
Executive Director, Public Defender Services of Lane County

About PDO

Public Defenders of Oregon (PDO), a nonprofit 501(c)4, was founded to advocate for nonprofit - public defender offices across Oregon. We organized in response to the overwhelming and urgent need to provide sound and sustainable public defense services, to build and retain a strong public defense workforce, and to equitably center the needs of all clients through effective and ethical representation.