

Submitter: Charlie Peirson

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety

Measure: SB5532

Chair, Co-Chairs, and Members of the Committee,

I'm an 8-year public defender in Portland. I'm writing to ask that you each do everything in your power to provide Oregon's public defense system with the resources that it needs.

To put it very simply, our clients deserve more than we can afford to provide them. The current level of service makes cases take longer which not only harms their interests but also creates challenges for everyone else involved. Our clients' families and employers suffer from their unavailability. Victims of crime suffer from delays and uncertainty. Prosecutors and courts are burdened by delays in cases that live too long. The result, systemically, is a chaotic muddle where everyone involved suffers more than necessary and where the results are more arbitrary.

In the long term, we need big solutions. Maybe we need a system that ties funding for defense directly to the decision to prosecute? Right now, prosecutors paid primarily out of county budgets decide to issue cases which have been defended by attorneys paid out of state coffers. Maybe we need to move the lion's share of trial level public defense into a state agency, as nearly every other state does. Maybe we need to change the composition of the Public Defense Services Commission, or change which branch of government houses the Office of Public Defense Services. Maybe we need to give prosecutors incentives to be more selective in their charging decisions, or maybe we need to triple the number of public defenders in the state.

In the short term, we need funding. We need to increase capacity as much as possible. We need to stabilize the current workforce. We need to modernize the practice of public defense both locally and at the state level. The money that PDSC and OPDS are currently requesting will help.

Thank you,
Charlie Peirson
Multnomah Defenders, Inc.
AFSCME Council 75 PAC Chair