

April 19, 2023

Senator Janeen Sollman and Representative Paul Evans
Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for SB 5532

Co-Chair Sollman, Co-Chair Evans and Members of the Committee:

TriMet is Oregon's largest transit provider, serving more than 1.6 million people across our 533-square mile service territory. In recent years, our agency has faced mounting public safety challenges on our transit system. Public defenders play a critical role in our public safety system, and Oregon's current lack of legal representation for people facing criminal charges is a crisis for both public safety and access to justice. For these reasons, TriMet writes today to express our support for SB 5532, the Public Defense Services Commission budget bill for the 2023-25 biennium.

The safety of our riders and operators is of paramount importance to TriMet, and we are concerned about the converging crises of behavioral health, addiction, and homelessness that are manifesting on our state's transit systems. In recent years, TriMet has seen a marked increase in problematic behavior on our system that includes violent confrontations, harassment, vandalism and open drug use on our buses and trains. TriMet employees were the victims of over 200 physical assaults and attempted physical assaults in 2021 alone.

TriMet's approach to safety and security is led by unarmed personnel trained in de-escalation, including staff who focus on identifying riders in crisis and connecting them with addiction, counseling and housing resources. However, when people commit acts of violence against our employees or our riders and law enforcement does get involved, we want these individuals to be held accountable for their actions. Too often, cases of assault against transit employees and riders are being dismissed because of the shortage of available public defenders. To hold these individuals accountable, they must also receive ethical and effective representation through the legal process. Oregon needs to increase its investment in public defense to address this crisis of lack of representation, and to ensure that we have a functional, effective public safety system.

This issue is crucial to TriMet because it impacts the safety of the riders who depend on our transit system and the employees who make our system work. We urge your support for SB 5532. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Myles Pengilly
State Government Affairs Manager
TriMet