

Testimony of Kathryn Morris, Attorney at Law
May 3, 2023

Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez, Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of the Board of Parole and Post-Prison Supervision (the Board) budget (SB 5528) and plead you to make additional investments in this agency. My name is Kathryn Morris, and I am an attorney licensed in Oregon. I have had the privilege of working with and representing Adults in Custody before the Board through my volunteer work with the Criminal Justice Reform Clinic (CJRC).

This work has been nothing short of life changing for me, personally and professionally. I entered law school in 2019 certain that I would use my law license to further my existing career in banking compliance, a field I worked in full time while completing school and which I have now occupied for nearly 15 years. In my second year of law school, however, I began working for the CJRC as an extern doing parole work. By the time of my graduation in 2022, it was clear to me that working with incarcerated people was both my passion and some of the most important work I could be doing.

Adults in Custody (AICs) preparing for a hearing before the Board face challenges and opportunities unique to the parole process, and the work that is necessary during this time is intense and expansive. Parole attorneys work with our clients to understand the factors and influences leading up to their crime of conviction, sit with them in their deepest feelings of remorse, help them articulate the darkest moments of their lives, and encourage ownership and pride in all the accomplishments they have achieved while incarcerated. We get to know the friends and family of our clients, and we advocate for community healing through forgiveness and recognition of rehabilitation. This work is powerfully human, and assisting AICs in confidently speaking to their own growth and redemption has been among the most meaningful work I have done to date. My clients have worked through addiction, engaged in deep introspection and personal growth, become leaders in their communities while incarcerated, and created networks of support for their release. It has been an honor to work with them, and I look forward to taking on more cases in the future.

The current rate of pay associated with taking these cases is, however, a limiting factor in my ability to devote myself to this work in the manner I would like to. I currently do this work pro bono, subsidized by my salary in banking during this transitional period in my career. When my work in banking ends, I will only be able to continue doing parole representation work if the compensation available is better matched to the time and effort expended for these cases.

Our communities, AICs, their families, and victims of crime are best served when competent and caring attorneys are involved in the parole process. Such attorneys can only take these cases sustainably if compensation is increased.

I am fully in support of the following:

BPPPS POP 105 + \$350,000: increased pay for attorneys and additional case types

Currently, the Board only pays a flat rate for Murder Review and Juvenile parole hearings. It is necessary to increase and maintain rates for all parole hearing types. Parole representation is important and demanding work that requires appropriate compensation.

BPPPS POP 102: victim services position

Parole hearings are difficult for everyone involved, especially victims. The addition of resources for victims during the parole process facilitates their navigation of this complex and intense process.

Thank you,

Kathryn Morris
Attorney at Law