

Submitter: Jennifer Fujii
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

Thank you for giving me the opportunity today to talk to you in support of SB 337 and HB 2467. My name is Jennifer Fujii, I am from Salem, Oregon and I am a member of the ACLU. No one in Oregon should face charges in Oregon without legal support, however our legal system is failing. Reports of defendants spending over a month in jail without appointment of legal counsel is disheartening. In March the public defenders in Marion County filed to withdraw from certain cases and not be appointed new cases. They have said they have 63 % of the attorneys for the caseload, short 11 lawyers. Reports from the American Bar Association this year found Oregon's public defense short 1300 lawyers.

A few years ago I watched my partner work hard to defend indigent defense clients in Salem municipal court. He was overwhelmed with the caseload, and worked more than full time to give them a defense but was unable to afford his own health insurance and maintenance on his car. He was not a new lawyer; had been working as a lawyer in Oregon for 8 years at this time. With a family to support, over a \$100K in law school debt, he felt he had to look for other work after less than a year, despite finding the work interesting and fulfilling professionally.

SB 337 and HB 2467 will ensure better access to legal representation by stabilizing and growing the work force, piloting a state program to get resources where we need them most, and give those accused of low level crimes the opportunity to take responsibility and work towards dismissal through community service and counseling.

People of color continued to be harmed disproportionately by the failures of the public defense system. We have a choice to pay to warehouse people in jail while they wait for the limited and overwhelmed public defenders to be found to provide people with their constitutional right to defense, or pay for an adequate defense now. We may end up arresting people only to have the DA forced to drop charges due to lack of public defenders, as we have seen last year in Multnomah county.

I'd like to think that in Oregon you are still innocent until proven guilty, but given the failures of the public defense system, it seems that you may be convicted of being poor if arrested in Oregon.

Please fully fund SB 337 and HB2467 so that our justice system can function. Thank you for your consideration.