



TO: Senate Committee on Judiciary
FROM: Mae Lee Browning, Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association
DATE: February 7, 2024
RE: Support for SB 1541

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Mae Lee Browning. I represent the Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association. OCDLA's 1,200 members statewide include public defense providers, private bar attorneys, investigators, experts, and law students. Our attorneys represent Oregon's children and parents in juvenile dependency proceedings, youth in juvenile delinquency proceedings, adults in criminal proceedings at the trial and appellate level, as well as civil commitment proceedings throughout the state of Oregon. Our mission is championing justice, promoting individual rights, and supporting the legal defense community through education and advocacy.

I am writing to testify in support of SB 1541.

As Oregon faces an unprecedented crisis in access to justice, OCDLA believes it is the collective responsibility of courts, prosecutors, and defense attorneys to come together to resolve the crisis. OCDLA has identified inefficiencies in the legal system and proposed specific changes to court processes and prosecutor practices that will increase the general public's access to courts, save lawyer time, and achieve timely resolution of cases.

One example of a system inefficiency that takes up a lot of public defender time is having three trials scheduled to proceed on the same day, when it is impossible for the public defender to try all three cases in one day. The public defense attorney has to prep for all three trials and subpoena witnesses (both professional and lay witnesses) for all three trials. We hope that with additional judges, court docketing practices will change such that courts will not force schedule public defenders for multiple trials on one day.

Additional judges will increase Oregonians' opportunity to be heard in court and provide more capacity in the system for our criminal and juvenile defense attorneys to advocate for their clients and oftentimes, connect them to needed services.

Specialty courts, such as mental health and veterans' court, are in the three counties where new judicial positions will be added. Specialty courts offer treatment to Oregonians at a time when mental health services are sorely needed. Adding judges to the three counties could help keep the specialty courts running, while also increasing capacity to hold trials.

OCDLA respectfully urges you to pass SB 1541.