

February 4, 2025

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

Oregon faces a severe public defense crisis. One key element in addressing the crisis is ensuring that new attorneys enter the profession with strong mentorship and the training necessary to meet the demands of this challenging work. SB 474 will establish the Criminal Defense Clinical Legal Education State Program, funded through the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, to train and mentor Oregon's newest public defenders.

During the 2024 Legislative Session, the legislature allocated a total of \$2.1 million to the University of Oregon, Lewis and Clark, and Willamette University Law Schools to provide intensive, structured training and supervision of court certified law students to undertake misdemeanor cases. As mandated by the legislature, the clinics are expected to train 60 law students over the course of the academic year to provide public defense services for eligible defendants on 300 to 400 misdemeanor cases. The clinics are on track to more than exceed these expectations.

With the first semester complete and the spring semester underway, more than 49 students are enrolled in clinics in Lane, Marion, Multnomah, and Washington Counties who have provided public defense services on over 296 cases. Students who are in the clinics today have already assisted with the current backlog of cases and will graduate misdemeanor certified– ready to handle cases off the unrepresented list on day one. As we forecast into the 2025-2027 biennium we expect to have a total of 120 students trained through the clinics and provide public defense services on nearly 1,000 cases.

Building a strong pipeline of well-trained public defenders is essential to the legislature's efforts to reform Oregon's public defense system. SB 474 will allocate \$3.58 million per biennium to support Oregon's criminal defense misdemeanor clinics, ensuring they can continue to train new public defenders and provide high-quality legal representation to underserved individuals who are currently going unrepresented.

We know there is no silver bullet that will solve Oregon's public defense crisis– it is a long-term problem that will require a long-term, multi-faceted solution. Our criminal defense legal education clinics are part of that solution today and will continue to be with ongoing funding and support from the legislature.



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