

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide supportive comments on SB 474 and for your attention to public defense in Oregon. My name is Alexa Bascon, and I am a current student in the Willamette University College of Law Criminal Defense Clinic. I participated in this clinic to gain real-world experience representing clients and to prepare for a career in public defense.

Through the clinic, I will have the opportunity to directly contribute to addressing Oregon's public defense crisis by handling real misdemeanor cases under the supervision of a qualified attorney. Beyond just technical legal skills, my supervising attorney teaches me how to connect with clients, build trust, navigate complex court systems, and fight for fair outcomes, which is a critical skill in a public defender. The clinic teaches us essential aspects of public defense that can't be learned from textbooks alone. These interpersonal skills are crucial for effective public defense work and typically take years to develop. The clinic accelerates this learning process, ensuring that graduates are truly prepared for the challenges of public defense work. By the time I graduate, I will be ready to manage misdemeanor cases and well on my way to handling lesser felonies, which will significantly reduce my early career learning curve.

The public defense crisis in Oregon requires innovative solutions. Law school public defense clinics represent one such solution, preparing qualified, passionate defenders who can hit the ground running. By supporting and expanding programs like this, we can help ensure a steady stream of well-prepared public defenders who are ready to serve our community's most vulnerable members.

I most sincerely urge the committee to support continued funding for the law school public defense clinics through SB 474. By doing so, the legislature will ensure that more students receive the training they need to serve as public defenders, addressing a critical shortage of qualified attorneys and strengthening Oregon's justice system.

Sincerely,  
Alexa Bascon