

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 Hyejin Lee and I am a current student in the University of Oregon School of Law. I participated in the Criminal Defense Clinic to gain real-world experience representing clients and to prepare for a career in public defense.

Throughout the semester, I have managed multiple misdemeanor cases from start to finish, working closely under the supervision of a qualified attorney at the Multnomah Defenders Inc. My supervising attorney emphasized the importance of building trust with clients and taught me how to connect with them and advocate for fair and just outcomes. I have learned how to advocate effectively and stay committed to the work, and I have also gained valuable courtroom experience that has prepared me to step into public defense roles. I am confident that this hands-on experience has provided me with practical skills that are needed to handle misdemeanor cases immediately upon graduation.

Working with experienced attorneys at the Multnomah Defenders Inc. has allowed me to understand the realities and challenges public defenders face, such as heavy caseloads and limited resources. This experience certainly deepened my appreciation for the significant contributions public defenders make to the community, and by participating in the clinic, I have gained an invaluable opportunity to contribute to Oregon's public defense system. Based on my experience, I believe that the clinic's approach to creating skilled, prepared attorneys is crucial to meeting Oregon's growing demand for public defenders.

I 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,
Hyejin Lee