

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 Maddie Diehl and I am a current student in the Lewis & Clark Law School Criminal Defense Clinic. I participated in this clinic to gain real-world experience representing clients and to prepare for a career in public defense.

My time as a participant in this clinic has been extremely rewarding and allowed me to build the essential skills to succeed in my future career as a public defender. I have managed multiple cases from start to finish, gaining critical courtroom experience that has prepared me to step into public defense roles immediately after graduation. I have a deep love for this work and an appreciation for its importance, especially in this moment of public defender shortages. Through the clinic, I have been able to directly contribute to addressing Oregon's public defense crisis by handling real misdemeanor cases under the supervision of a qualified attorney. Beyond legal skills, my supervising attorney teaches me how to connect with clients, build trust, and fight for fair outcomes, which is a critical skill in a public defender. Building these skills early in my career with the additional support provided by the clinic will empower me to excel in my post-graduation public defense work and avoid many of the early pitfalls that disillusion some prospective public defenders.

I hope to continue my work at Metropolitan Public Defenders following my law school graduation. The clinic is designed to make the transition from clinic work to regular practice as seamless as possible. The clinic integrates bar admission preparation through Oregon's supervised practice rules, so I can begin serving clients right after graduation without gaps. These clinics create a pipeline of ready-to-serve public defenders, addressing a statewide crisis and ensuring new lawyers like me can immediately contribute to the system. My clinic experience, especially working closely with experienced attorneys, has given me invaluable insights into the realities of public defense and practical skills for client advocacy. Not only has this experience increased my passion for public defense, it has prepared me to manage high caseloads, advocate effectively, and stay committed to the work.

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 like me receive the training they need to serve as public defenders, addressing a critical shortage of qualified attorneys and strengthening Oregon's justice system.

Sincerely,
Maddie Diehl