



METROPOLITAN PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES, INC.

February 5, 2025

To: Senate Committee On Judiciary
From: Carl Macpherson, Executive Director, Metropolitan Public Defender

Re: **Support for SB 474**

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee:

I am the Executive Director of Metropolitan Public Defender (MPD), a 501(c)(3) non-profit law firm, which is the largest trial-level public defense service provider in Oregon. I write to express MPD's strong support for SB 474. This bill provides one critical piece of a multi-faceted plan to make progress on public defense and the unrepresented crisis in our state.

We have a shortage of qualified attorneys for public defense clients in Oregon. This past week, the Oregon Judicial Department presented data showing that "public defense-related case filings increased in 2024 for the fourth consecutive year." So far in FY 2025, OJD indicates criminal case filings are up 34% in Washington County, 7% in Multnomah County and almost 12% statewide. Further, OJD projects that cases requiring public defense services will increase 22.4% statewide in 2025-27. The combination of the current unrepresented crisis, the shortage of public defense attorneys and the increase in case filings provide clear evidence that we need more public defense attorneys in Oregon.

The non-profit public defender offices, including MPD, are the offices that recruit, train, supervise, develop and mentor new public defenders. In 2024, the Legislature invested in the creation of legal clinics to help train, supervise and develop future public defenders while they are still law students. Although the clinics just started in September of 2024, we are seeing positive results for both the short and long term.

At MPD alone, we have 11 students providing supervised representation in both Multnomah and Washington counties. Since September of 2024, the students have represented clients in 172 cases. Notably, 170 cases were on the unrepresented list. This is proof of an immediate impact the clinics are having on the unrepresented crisis. The clinics will continue the rest of the school year and into the summer; therefore, we project that the clinic will provide representation in more than 250 cases at MPD alone for the 2024-25 academic year.

The creation and continuation of the legal clinics will also help recruitment and retention efforts for our state. Legal clinics attract prospective law students who have an interest in public defense. The training and practical experience of clinics will expose more law students to public defense. Furthermore, law students will be equipped with skills and knowledge that will help them provide immediate assistance and representation after they graduate from law school and are admitted to the Bar.

MPD strongly supports SB 474 because it meets the immediate goal of providing representation for people who currently do not have it and the continuing goal of training, developing and preparing new lawyers to be public defenders upon graduation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.