

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

Although I have only been in the clinic since the start of the Spring semester I am already seeing the benefits of joining the clinic. Last year I took a course called Integrated Evidence and Trial Advocacy. In that course we learned the rules of evidence and got simulated experience using the rules of evidence as if we were in real court. Now that I am in the clinic I can continue to further develop my trial skills in a way that most other students just can't. Aside from the practical experience that I am gaining at MDI I am also learning how to be a lawyer from the good people who work there. That is just as valuable if not more than having someone teach you how to draft a motion. For someone who does not come from a family of lawyers, or any white collar professions for that matter, this mentorship is more than any support I could have imagined getting towards developing myself as a professional. So far I have observed 3 trials, conducted a client interview, observed the arraignment docket, met several DA's, and started working on my own cases. There is much more for me to learn and take a part in doing.

Working at the public defenders office has given me unmatched insight into the court system. It has made me comfortable being in this space, and it has given me a better appreciation for the big-picture work that needs to be done in the state of Oregon. At a career level this clinic is preparing me to be a first year misdemeanor attorney. By the time I graduate from law school I will have close to a year of experience litigating. This will make me a better and more confident advocate for my clients. This clinic is beneficial to me personally, but it is also beneficial for the entire legal community because thanks to the clinic we will have better advocates entering the profession.

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,
Sergio J. Del Carmen