

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 Matt Benedict and I am a current student at Willamette University College of Law, and I will be enrolling in the Willamette Law Criminal Defense Clinic. I hope to participate in this clinic to gain real-world experience representing clients and to prepare for a career in public defense.

Through the clinic, I will be able to directly contribute to addressing Oregon's public defense crisis by handling real misdemeanor cases under the supervision of a qualified attorney. 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. Beyond legal skills, my supervising attorney will teach me how to connect with clients, build trust, and fight for fair outcomes, which is a critical skill in a public defender.

Working closely with experienced attorneys will give me invaluable insights into the realities of public defense and practical skills for client advocacy. This will help me manage high caseloads, advocate effectively, and stay committed to the work. 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.

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,  
Matt Benedict  
1L at Willamette University College of Law