

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, Members of the Judiciary 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 Jane Miramontes-Somerville and I am a current student in the Willamette University Criminal Defense Clinic. I am participating in this clinic to gain real-world experience representing clients and to prepare for a career in public defense.

The clinic started for me just a few weeks ago and I have already learned so much. I get to learn from amazing faculty and community attorneys. Most importantly, me and my classmates will get to do real work for real clients. That experience is more valuable than anything we could learn from our textbooks.

Oregon is in a crisis right now - there are a record number of unrepresented defendants and not enough defense attorneys to help them. This crisis won't be resolved unless law students are attracted to the work. With the clinics, students can get a taste of criminal defense early in our careers and gain the skills we need to hit the ground running. By funding these clinics, the legislature is making an investment in a future where everyone's constitutional rights are protected.

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,

Jane Miramontes-Somerville