

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 Caroline M. Taylor and I am a practicing attorney at Multnomah Defenders, Inc. I participated in the Criminal Justice Reform Clinic at Lewis & Clark Law School to gain real-world experience representing clients and to prepare for a career in public defense. During my time as a clinic student, I worked on two important projects: the Juvenile Set-Aside Project and the Parole Project.

The Juvenile Set-Aside Project provided direct representation to juveniles seeking to set-aside their adjudications due to ineffective assistance of counsel issues and in the interests of justice. I worked closely with another student, Jake Larsen, and staff attorney Laney Ellisor, as we reviewed cases, identified potential legal issues, and brought petitions on behalf of youth. The Juvenile Set-Aside Project provided my first opportunity to appear on someone's behalf in court. Working directly with our clients was deeply meaningful for me as a student, and solidified my desire to work in indigent defense as a lawyer.

My work in the Parole Project gave me many of the emotional tools necessary to engage with my clients today, who suffer from a lack of resources and compassion. I worked with staff attorney Mieke de Vrind to interview clients about their crimes of conviction to prepare them to go before the Parole Board. This required revisiting trauma from decades past, and writing memoranda in advance of each hearing. Ms. de Vrind taught me how to connect with my clients and build trust, but equally as important, she taught me how to take care of myself mentally and emotionally while processing difficult case facts. The Parole Project was so powerful in my law school education that I continued exploring parole through my capstone.

Joining the Clinic required a robust application process including a writing sample, resume, and interview. Of note, most students who applied to be in the clinic did not get in; a majority were placed on a waiting list to see if summer and school year positions opened up, and even then a spot was never guaranteed. I applied as a second-year student and did not get into the Clinic- I worked over the summer for the Clinic and was still waitlisted for my third-year. Because a well-run clinic requires lots of one-on-one time with staff attorneys, joining the clinic was a very competitive process.

Being a clinic student provided opportunities to explore novel legal issues and develop the essential emotional tools necessary to provide exceptional representation as a lawyer. Working with Ms. Ellisor, Ms. de Vrind, and Professor Aliza Kaplan was a humbling experience—I was fortunate to work with exceptional lawyers, whose time and insights I could harness for my future professional benefit. Without the mentorship, training, and relationships I built during my time as a clinic student, I know I would not be the public defender I am today. I am grateful every day that I was lucky enough to be a clinic student. My representation of my clients now is better for the experience I gained in the clinic, and I am a more prepared and effective advocate for my clients.

Now that I am a practicing attorney, I participate in acting as a mentor to the recently funded MDI Clinic. I invite students to court hearings, interviews with clients when permitted, and strategy sessions for various cases. I also review their motions and arguments to assist them in becoming the best lawyers they can be. Our clinic students' enthusiasm for indigent defense knows no bounds, and their zeal for criminal law and fighting for members of our community reminds me why I became a lawyer. Their bright ideas and curiosity boost the spirits of our clients and staff, and I love to see them develop into attorneys.

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,
Caroline M. Taylor