

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 Kylie Root and I am a current student in Willamette University College of Law Criminal Defense Clinic. I participated in this clinic to gain real-world experience representing clients and to prepare for a career in public defense.

I have had the absolute privilege to gain practical, real-world experience working with indigent clients over the last semester and a half. Through the clinic, I have obtained skills that I am unable to get in any other law class currently offered. I am learning the ins and outs of what it's like to become a misdemeanor attorney before I graduate law school, gaining critical courtroom experience that has equipped me with necessary skills for post-graduation jobs, and contributing to the necessary function of our criminal legal system.

Through this clinic, myself and other student attorneys have had invaluable experience working through multiple cases from start to finish. Through this experience, we have truly been able to understand the significance and the sensitivity of the work public defenders do. If we did not have access to the criminal defense clinic, none of us would be as well-oriented for real-life legal work as we currently are now. This opportunity will significantly lessen the early career learning curve and will ultimately produce more competent attorneys straight out of law school, which is necessary to address the current public defender crisis in Oregon.

The value that the clinic has brought to my professional development as a future public defender is immeasurable. I have learned more in my time in the clinic about how to be a lawyer and how to ardently advocate for clients than any of the classes I have taken in law school. I am seeing the real-life impact that criminal prosecutions have on people. Even as a law student, I have been able to form and foster relationships with clients. I have been able to celebrate achievements with my clients, both in their personal lives and relating to their cases. These experiences have not only given me exposure to real work but also furthered my passion for the work in a way that I otherwise would not have been able to experience until after graduation.

Programs like the criminal defense clinic provide students with invaluable experience that cannot be found anywhere else in law school. I am incredibly lucky that I have been able to be a part of this program and have a real-life impact on not just my client's lives but also in the current public defender crisis. This opportunity is one that will continue to allow the prospects of legal education to blossom and is necessary for the production of capable, competent attorneys as we all transition from academia to practice.

I strongly and respectfully 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,

Kylie M. Root
JD Expected 2025
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