

PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES OF LANE COUNTY, INC.

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February 6, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: Caitlin Plummer, Executive Director, Public Defender Services of Lane County

Re: Support for SB 474

Dear Chair Prozenski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee:

I am the Executive Director of Public Defender Services of Lane County (PDSLCL), a non-profit law firm handling the majority of public defense cases in Lane County. PDSLCL strongly supports the continued funding of criminal defense clinics through SB 474.

Non-profit offices like PDSLCL serve as recruitment and training grounds for new public defenders in Oregon. At a time when Oregon is facing a critical shortage of public defenders, the criminal defense clinics at Lewis & Clark, the University of Oregon, and Willamette law schools are more important than ever. These clinics provide much-needed representation to clients and are an essential tool in the ongoing effort to ensure a robust and stable public defense workforce in Oregon. At PDSLCL, many of our attorneys worked in the University of Oregon clinic as law students. Their experiences in the clinic convinced them to pursue careers in public defense and provided them with hands-on training that allowed them to hit the ground running after graduation.

Thus far, Lane County has been able to largely avoid an unrepresented crisis, in part due to the ability to recruit and retain sufficient attorneys to handle the cases filed. However, challenges are on the horizon. Case filings in Lane County have increased by 24% in the last year, and OJD expects the demand for public defenders to continue rising. To meet this increased demand, PDSLCL will need to maintain a robust recruitment and training pipeline. The criminal defense clinic will be an essential tool in this effort.

Public defenders are deeply committed to this work, and to ensuring that every Oregonian who needs one has access to a well-trained attorney. The unrepresented crisis requires everyone in the system to work together on solutions. Non-profit providers want to be part of the solution by continuing to bring more attorneys into this work. An investment in criminal defense clinics will help us do so.

My own experience in a law school legal clinic inspired me to enter—and remain in—the field of public defense. I know many other public defenders have similar stories. SB 474 is a critical piece of solving the unrepresented crisis, and I urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to support this smart investment in the future of public defense.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Plummer
Executive Director
Public Defender Services of Lane County