



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 474
SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 6, 2025**

My name is Mae Lee Browning, Legislative Director of the Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association. I testify on behalf of OCDLA in strong support SB 474, which would establish a Criminal Defense Clinical Legal Education Program within the Higher Education Coordinating Commission and continue funding for criminal defense clinics at all three Oregon law schools.

OCDLA's 1,200 members statewide include public defense providers, private bar attorneys, investigators, experts, and law students. Our attorneys represent Oregon's children and parents in juvenile dependency proceedings, youth in juvenile delinquency proceedings, adults in criminal proceedings at the trial and appellate level, as well as civil commitment proceedings throughout the state of Oregon. Our mission is championing justice, promoting individual rights, and supporting the legal defense community through education and advocacy.

We know the importance of hands-on, high quality, intensive training that is happening in the Criminal Defense Clinics. OCDLA provides high-quality trial skills training and education on an array of topics practitioners need for all aspects of criminal and juvenile defense. OCDLA presents approximately 12 seminars a year plus webinars, distributes publications on topics of interest and need to practitioners, among other educational opportunities. Our seminars and manuals are volunteer-run. OCDLA has a well-established culture of volunteer training by our more experienced members. OCDLA's Executive Director even teaches at the University of Oregon Law School.

All system stakeholders need to come together to improve the criminal legal system in Oregon. There's no one silver bullet that will solve the crisis. It is going to take a combination of attracting law school grads, mentoring and training early career lawyers, out of state recruitment, retaining the current workforce, and improving court procedures and charging practices.

The Criminal Defense Clinics at the law schools play a *huge* part in the solution. Law students need real-life work experience to learn how to practice law. Some law students seek out externships – working at a law firm for school credit. These experiences can vary with the type of employer (though there are specific requirements that must be met to receive externship credit). The Criminal Defense Clinics are the perfect balance between classroom educational learning and real-life work experience under the supervision of a practicing public defender. The law students in the Criminal Defense Clinics will be better prepared to hit the ground running as a practicing public defender after they graduate law school. With the training they received, these new public defenders will have better job satisfaction which will keep them practicing public defense.

To keep these clinics functioning, there needs to be stable, continued funding. Without state funding and support for the clinics, we wouldn't have them. We urge your support of SB 474 to continue the pipeline of law students into public defense.

Mae Lee Browning
Legislative Director
Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association