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February 6, 2025

Re: In support of SB 474

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, Members of the Committee:

I am the Director of Training for Public Defender Services of Lane County and the supervising attorney for the University of Oregon School of Law Criminal Defense Clinic, and I write to express my strong support for SB 474. I have been a Public Defender in Oregon for nearly twenty years, and I have seen firsthand the changes we have made to Public Defense in order to better serve our clients in that time. In 2020, I became the Supervising Attorney for the Clinic. I am proud of the work we have done here, and ask that the Legislature continue to support Oregon law schools in educating and training future generations of Public Defenders.

Every day I see how important a clinical education is for developing attorneys, both on a short-term and a long-term basis. By working closely with clients over the course of a semester or a year, students develop a deeper connection to their clients as individuals and a more personal commitment to the work. New attorneys who come to PDSLCL with clinic experience have a smoother transition from student to practicing attorney, are more familiar with or adaptable to local practices, and tend to require less supervision and oversight as they transition into a full workload and progress to more serious cases. Experiential learning through a clinic is a critical piece of a legal education; I appreciate that Oregon's law schools are embracing this model. I believe the Legislature's continued efforts are needed to ensure that this model is sustainable.

Participation in a clinic prepares students to immediately enter the profession: Many students come to the Clinic having never represented a client or made a court appearance, and the experience of working with a person in need on an active case with real consequences can be overwhelming. In a clinic, students have time to plan client meetings and identify their goals for their first client interaction. They focus on building a professional relationship with the client, while at the same time relating important legal information and answering questions as they come up. Students do this with the support of an experienced attorney and spend time debriefing those meetings and appearances afterward, identifying areas in which they felt confident or unsure, and forming strategies to improve their work. That kind of education is impossible to simulate in a classroom. It is absolutely necessary to produce effective future attorneys.

I believe that work in a clinic can help also students and attorneys maintain a sustainable practice and mitigate the stresses that contribute to burnout in the legal profession. The clinic experience mitigates the overwhelming feeling of being wholly responsible for a client's future by allowing

students to share that weight with an experienced supervising attorney, ensuring that small missteps are easily corrected and providing a safety net for both students and clients. A clinical education helps students learn from mistakes and keep their work in perspective, helping build tools and reliable practices that attorneys can rely on well into their careers.

Criminal Defense Clinics are also important to recruiting new attorneys to our work. There has been a recent increase in criminal filings—especially in misdemeanor drug possession cases—putting pressure on an already strained system. Our clinic currently does not have an application process, so people with differing levels of interest in criminal defense can sign up and learn about our work. Students who go to law school with interests in other fields, like environmental, education, or employment law often discover that their values align with ours and take a deep satisfaction from the work they are doing and the community they develop at our office. It is gratifying to see people who may not have had an interest in criminal defense when they entered law school develop a commitment to the work and a desire to join the profession when they graduate.

Continued legislative funding is important, so that we do not have to divert dollars allocated to Public Defense to educate the next generation of criminal defense attorneys and Public Defenders. It allows us to have more attorney flexibility to cover meetings and court appearances, and to assist in case preparation to ensure quality of representation, not just quantity. Finally, it allows us to fully fund the administrative and investigative work that goes into creating and maintaining a client file: to pay for the many business expenses that come with running this program.

I support SB 474 as an important tool to provide quality representation for our clients by meeting a current need for representation in Oregon and by ensuring that Oregon law schools continue to graduate skilled, practice-ready students to be Public Defenders upon graduation.

Sincerely,



Reid Kajikawa
Director of Training
Public Defender Services of Lane County