



Date: February 6, 2025
To: Senator Floyd Prozanski, Chair, Senate Committee on Judiciary
Senator Kim Thatcher, Vice-Chair, Senate Committee on Judiciary
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary
From: Jennifer Reynolds, Interim Dean, University of Oregon School of Law
RE: Testimony in Favor of SB 474

The University of Oregon School of Law writes in strong support of SB 474, which establishes a Criminal Defense Clinical Legal Education Program within the Higher Education Coordinating Commission and continues providing funding for criminal defense clinics in the State.

Through SB 474, the legislature is implementing a bold and effective strategy for addressing the pressing need for criminal defense in Oregon. Clinical offerings are a unique opportunity to immerse law students in public defense practice under the close supervision and guidance of a practicing attorney. Investing in legal clinics broadens the pipeline for provision of legal services in the short term while training law students for future careers in criminal defense.

With the funding support from the legislature for this current academic year, the University of Oregon School of Law has been able to (1) retain and build the capacity of our existing Criminal Defense Clinic, which is housed at the Public Defender Services of Lane County; and (2) launch a new Criminal Defense Clinic in Portland with Multnomah Defenders, Inc.

- The **Criminal Defense Clinic at the Public Defender Services of Lane County (PDSLCL)** is one of the primary pathways for University of Oregon School of Law students to gain hands-on training and exposure to criminal defense as a career option. Over the last twenty years, more than 300 of our law students have enrolled in the PDSLCL Clinic, working on misdemeanor cases in the Lane County Circuit Court.

The impact of the PDSLCL Clinic on future careers in criminal defense has been significant. **The majority of University of Oregon School of Law students who accept post-graduate positions with criminal defense providers have taken the PDSLCL Clinic during their second or third year of law school.**

So far this year, the PDSLCL Clinic has closed twenty-two cases and is expecting another seventy-five new cases this spring. From the start of Fall 2024 semester until now, our students have spent nearly three thousand hours working in the PDSLCL Clinic. Over the next two years, the PDSLCL Clinic is anticipating approximately 130 cases per year.

- The **Criminal Defense Clinic in Portland with Multnomah Defenders, Inc. (MDI)**, started in Portland in Fall 2024 and has already closed fifteen cases. The MDI Clinic provides clinical opportunities for students from all three law schools of the State, and we work in close collaboration with partners from Willamette University College of Law and Lewis & Clark Law

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School on making this clinic effective and successful. Over the next two years, the MDI Clinic is projected to handle fifty cases per year.

Partnership between the state and law schools is critically important for criminal defense clinics at the three Oregon law schools to continue serving individuals charged with crimes. We are continually seeking donor gifts and grants to help support our clinics, but not all donors and grants direct their support to criminal defense. Indeed, only about a quarter of the law schools in our region even have criminal defense clinics. Without public funding, it would be financially prohibitive for the law schools of the State to continue offering clinic services to criminal defendants.

Supporting criminal defense clinics in Oregon may have salutary ripple effects throughout the State. Although the criminal defense clinics at the University of Oregon School of Law are based in Eugene and Portland, we recognize the special burdens that the public defense crisis is causing in rural parts of Oregon. We are exploring ways to connect our clinical students and externs with rural practitioners and to help our graduates learn about and prepare for public defender jobs in rural areas. State funding for our criminal defense clinics will improve our ability to build these networks.

Finally, with the Supervised Practice Pathway as an alternative pathway to licensure in Oregon, increasing the number and availability of clinical opportunities has become a priority for the law schools of the State. A portion of supervised practice can be accomplished during law school through a clinic or externship. As demand for the SPPE increases, law students will be seeking more and more experiential opportunities during law school. Increasing the capacity of the criminal defense clinics will allow more students to accrue hours toward licensure during law school and enable them to transition immediately after graduation to supervised practice—while also providing much-needed support to a larger number of criminal defense clients.

As the State’s public law school, the University of Oregon School of Law has a mission of public service to the State and to the people of Oregon. We are committed to helping address Oregon’s public defender crisis by providing traditional and clinical educational opportunities to law students that inspire and train them for work in public defense. We are grateful for the partnership of the State in achieving these goals.

I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

Warmly,

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