

Dear Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Chotzen, Vice-Chair Wallan, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Fernando Santos-Campos and I am a Legal Assistant at the Public Defender of Marion County (PDMC) in Salem, Oregon. I have worked in public defense for about a year now. I urge you to oppose the amendments to HB 2641 that would remove national caseload standards for public defenders from Oregon law. These standards are essential safeguards that protect our clients' constitutional rights and are vital to the retention of public defense professionals and staff.

I would like to contribute a perspective that I believe has not been thoroughly considered, which is that of support staff to Public Defenders. I have been active in assisting ~4 attorneys manage their caseloads, which includes a variety of tasks such as updating their calendars, filing legal documents, and interpreting for Spanish speaking clients to name a few.

This decision would not only negatively affect the ability of attorneys to fully represent their clients, but it will also cut into the lives of many support staff like me. As team members, we form relationships with our attorneys', and they become pillars to us. Most support staff in criminal defense understand how important our roles are to the lives of our clients. They are a big part of what keep us motivated in this profession. Especially given the shortage of Spanish interpreters in Marion County, many of us support staff step in to help attorneys communicate with their clients. But we too are at capacity between balancing internal administrative tasks and assistance to attorneys like helping interpret for them when needed. Like attorneys, our work and efforts will be stretched thin, and every client deserves to have quality representation.

Finally, as an aspiring attorney myself I must be honest and say that potential changes like this one contribute to my feelings of being pushed away from the idea of ever practicing public defense. To clarify, I believe that public defense is of extreme importance to keep our communities intact, but the reputation that this profession has obtained over the years is daunting. Policies that devalue sustainability, which is highly needed in a profession as tough as being an attorney, will in my opinion further negatively contribute to the image of public defense work both to future aspiring lawyers and to the public as a whole.

As future attorneys wanting to make positive changes, individuals like me deserve to enter a workforce that doesn't infringe on our ability to fully represent our clients and their constitutional rights - especially when our goals are to protect and serve our communities. Why must our commitment to that positive impact be at our own expense or that of our clients?

Rolling back caseload standards now will not provide any relief to the people who need attorneys, but it will send a negative message to hard-working public defenders and the communities we serve. And it will only further scare off aspiring attorneys like myself !

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Fernando Santos-Campos  
Salem, Oregon