



Oregon Crime Victims Law Center

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Re: HB 2614

Dear Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Chotzen, Vice-Chair Wallan, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Crime Victims Law Center, I am submitting this testimony regarding House Bill 2614, which focuses on improving the provision of public defense services in Oregon.

OCVLC is a nonprofit organization that provides free legal representation and advocacy to crime victims. Oregon's victims have constitutional and statutory rights in the criminal justice system, which include the rights to justice, to a meaningful role in the system, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to be protected throughout the criminal justice process. We regularly see the impact that crime has on victims, with long-lasting trauma that affects nearly every aspect of a victim's life. Participating in the criminal justice system and attempting to achieve a measure of justice is a critical part of addressing that trauma for many victims. Unfortunately, that quest for justice has been thwarted for some recently due to the number of defendants without counsel. There are indefinite delays in cases where a defendant is unrepresented, and these delays deny not only the defendant their opportunity to address the charges against them, but also the victim in their search for justice and their right to a meaningful role in the system. The delay in appointing counsel to defendants in custody is also affecting the court's release decisions, impacting victim and community safety. In addition, the longer the case drags on, the more violations of victims' rights occur. For example, a victim who has suffered financial losses due to crime is unable to seek restitution. A victim who wishes to be able to address the court regarding sentencing is unable to exercise that right. Further, there is no "meaningful role" for victims in situations where a defendant is unrepresented; instead, justice and that meaningful role in the system is simply halted. The lack of any definitive answers as to when a case is going to proceed only exacerbates a victim's trauma, and delays their ability to move forward with their lives.

The current situation is failing Oregonians, not only defendants but also victims and the community at large. HB 2614 will hopefully provide solutions to a situation that is negatively impacting Oregon's victims. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rosemary W. Brewer

Rosemary W. Brewer
Executive Director