

## **Alexander Cambier- MDI Board Member**

Written testimony

Dear Co-Chair Broadman, Co-Chair Evans, and Members of the Joint Committee on Public Safety,

I'm Alexander Cambier, and I am a former public defender and currently a board member at Multnomah Defenders, Inc, (MDI) a nonprofit public defender. I'm an attorney working with Kafoury & McDougal, a civil firm in Portland.

When I started as a public defender with MDI on January 2, 2008, I knew that the work would be intense and challenging. I was driven by a deep responsibility to serve my clients and a firm commitment to the fundamental tenet of our justice system that everyone deserves quality representation, no matter their ability to pay.

For years, I worked long hours, sacrificing evenings and weekends all while being paid far less than the prosecutors assigned to handle the very same cases. My coworkers and I had untenable caseloads that did not allow us to spend sufficient time working up our clients' cases. Essentially being forced into an unethical scenario of triaging cases and deciding which clients were most in need of my time and effort at any given moment.

I completed many jury trials as a misdemeanor and then felony attorney. I transitioned into civil commitment appeals, and then returned to criminal trial work as a supervisor in 2022. As a supervisor, I had the privilege of mentoring and supporting attorneys learning how to defend clients facing felony charges, while continuing to handle my own caseload and trials.

When I returned to trial work in 2022, I witnessed the benefits of ethical caseloads. Clients were on par receiving better representation by attorneys who had time to review complicated discovery and properly prepare a defense.

In my 16 years as a public defender, I saw first-hand the tremendous value of nonprofit public defense providers. First as an incoming attorney and then as a mentor and supervisor, I witnessed how the nonprofit model allows us to recruit, support, and train attorneys to handle the complexities of public defense. Now as a board member at MDI, it is clear to me that we cannot make

sure everyone who needs a public defender has one without increasing the number of public defenders working in the system. Nonprofits are crucial to the long-term resolution of the crisis in our criminal legal system

I left public defense in part because I felt pressure from the court for us to take more cases than we could reasonably represent. Not only does that put defenders in unethical positions, it means that clients go without adequate representation in life-changing moments. The strong trial skills I developed as a public defender opened up new and better-paying opportunities that allow me to provide for my young family in Portland.

Public defenders and the nonprofits are essential to a healthy public safety system, and upholding our Constitutional guarantee of justice for all. I urge the Legislature to make smart investments in public defense to protect access to justice for all Oregonians.

Sincerely,



Alexander Cambier