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Re: Support for an accelerated rate increase for investigators

Dear Co-Chair Broadman, Co-chair Evans, and members of the committee:

I am a criminal defense attorney working in Oregon. Although I am in private practice, I accept court-appointed cases when I can. However, one of the major barriers to my accepting more court-appointed cases is that it is extremely difficult to find skilled investigators willing to work at the state rate.

I am writing to ask you to support the increase in the rate paid to public defense investigators included in POP 104 of the OPDC proposed budget, and to support accelerated implementation of the rate change, making it effective in July of 2025.

Oregon's criminal justice system is imperiled by the ongoing public defense crisis. As of February 20th there were [approximately 4,000](#) unrepresented individuals in the state. The state's response to this crisis has been to focus on increasing the number of available attorneys. While more attorneys are needed, this response has overlooked the legal investigators who make up a critical component of public defense. The number of skilled investigators willing to accept court-appointed cases is scarce because of inadequate pay. Therefore, even if the number of available attorneys were to increase, the inability to recruit and retain qualified investigators would continue to hamstring Oregon's public defense system and lead to unjust outcomes.

I strongly urge legislators to support POP 104 and to accelerate the raise to the investigator hourly rate to \$75 effective July of 2025.

Sincerely,



Sohaye Lee