



**TESTIMONY ON HB 5031  
JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY  
MARCH 19, 2025**

Co-Chairs Broadman and Evans, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mae Lee Browning, Legislative Director of the Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association.<sup>1</sup>

OCDLA recommends funding for nonprofits, consortia, and law firms above current service level not only because these contracted providers are more cost efficient and take more cases than the state trial division and the hourly panel, but because they are essential to recruit and train law students.

In 2024, the legislature allocated \$2.1 million to establish criminal defense legal clinics at the law schools. The clinics are connected to the nonprofit public defense offices in Portland, Salem, and Eugene. This created a pipeline from law school to public defense. The clinics are expected to train 60 law students over the course of the academic year to provide public defense services on 300 to 400 misdemeanor cases.

If funding for nonprofits, consortia, and law firms is only maintained at current service level, the nonprofits will not be able to hire the law students they've trained, and the legislature would have flushed the money it spent on the criminal defense legal clinics down the drain.

These law students will not go to the hourly program, nor will they be hired by the state trial division because the state trial division doesn't hire newly qualified misdemeanor attorneys. The state trial division also doesn't have any training programs established and to direct them to do would be a huge waste of resources when entities like nonprofits, consortia, and law firms are already set up for that.

In addition to the criminal defense legal clinics, there is another pipeline from law school to public defense - the SPPE (Supervised Practice Portfolio Examination) program created by the Oregon State Bar. This is an alternative to the traditional bar exam where law students continuously represent clients, instead of taking time off to study for the bar exam, and receive intensive training. Students who wish to pursue SPPE must receive a job offer from an employer. Funding for nonprofits, consortia and law firms must be increased above current service level so they can make job offers to students who wish to pursue SPPE in public defense.

If nonprofits, consortia, and law firms can't hire the next cohort of law students, these students will go to another practice area and we will have lost the opportunity to increase our workforce.

If the legislature does not increase funding for nonprofits, consortia, and law firms, there will be no one to train and hire the next generation of public defenders.

Law students seek out clerkships during the summer. Many of these clerkships turn into jobs after graduation. Law students prioritize paid summer clerkships so as to avoid or reduce taking out student loans for the summer. In order to compete with other practice areas and private firms, public defense entities must be able to offer paid summer clerkships to law students. Funding for nonprofits, consortia, and law firms should be provided to cover law student clerkships.

Funding should be provided to nonprofits, consortia, and law firms for out-of-state recruitment. This includes, but is not limited to, fees to publish job postings in other states, bar license transfer fees, and travel/moving expenses.

OCDLA urges this Committee and the legislature to increase funding beyond current service level for nonprofits, consortia, and law firms, so they can hire the law students they've trained, bring on all other law students who want to work in public defense, and recruit from out of state.

Thank you.



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<sup>i</sup> OCDLA's 1,200 members statewide include public defense providers, private bar attorneys, investigators, experts, and law students. Our attorneys represent Oregon's children and parents in juvenile dependency proceedings, youth in juvenile delinquency proceedings, adults in criminal proceedings at the trial and the appellate level, as well as civil commitment proceedings throughout the state of Oregon. Our mission is championing justice, promoting individual rights, and supporting the legal defense community through education and advocacy.