

March 20, 2025

Dear Co-Chair Broadman, Co-Chair Evans, Members of the Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Wakefield. I am the Senior Staff Attorney in the Parent Child Advocacy Division at Metropolitan Public Defender (MPD). I have worked as a public defender since I started at MPD in 2001. I am a proud member of AFSCME Local 3668 - Metropolitan Public Defenders. I am writing in support of funding the public defense budget- HB 5031.

Metropolitan Public Defender - Local 3668 has over 180 members who live in Clackamas, Multnomah , Washington counties, including attorneys, investigators, case managers, and legal/office/data integrity assistants. We represent Adult charged in Criminal court, Juveniles accused in the Juvenile Justice system, Families and children in the child welfare/foster care system. In my current role, I represent teenagers who are in the juvenile justice system and families and children who are involved in the Child Welfare system.

Local 3668 Public defenders are:

- **Attorneys** manage cases from violations, Misdemeanors to the most complex Felony cases. Attorneys review the state provided police reports and hours of body camera footage and digital discovery. Complex cases can generate hundreds of hours of video and digital recordings that must be reviewed. Attorneys review thousands of pages of medical and other records, conduct client interviews, research and file motions, conduct court hearings—all while preparing for cases for trial. Attorneys are charged with providing representation consistent with the US and Oregon Constitution as well as the Oregon Rules of Professional Conduct.
- **Investigators** obtain records, locate, interview and subpoena witnesses, write reports, collect evidence that may have been missed by the police, and support the attorney and the legal team.
- **Case Managers** meet with clients, assess needs, help our client's access critical health care and treatment programs. They assist in navigating barriers to stable housing, and collaborate with attorneys and community partners to advocate for client's health and social needs.
- **Legal/Office/Data Integrity Assistants** communicate with clients and friends, updating frantic loved ones and assuring them that the legal team is ready to help. They process and organize vast amounts of digital discovery and information associated with these cases.

Nonprofit public defense law firms are a cost-efficient and versatile part of the system. We handle thousands of cases every month. We recruit and train dozens of new public defenders every year. Nonprofit defenders will be able to recruit and retain even more attorneys - and help solve the current crisis - if we are compensated fairly. This includes a necessary cost-of-living increase. We can move toward resolving this crisis by compensating nonprofits for recruitment, funding the actual cost of investigators, continuing to fund the four legal clinic programs, and creating more opportunities for new attorneys to enter the field through Supervised Practice Portfolio Examination (SPPE).

As an attorney who works at a nonprofit public defense office, I know first hand the impacts that quality representation brings with our integrated public defense teams. Clients benefit when the attorney, the legal assistant, the investigator, and the case manager are pulling together on the client's behalf. Everyone who is charged with a crime deserves a lawyer, not just those who can afford it. Having a robust defense bar is essential to a fair and just system.

Thank you,  
Elizabeth Wakefield, Attorney at Law  
Portland, OR