

Submitter: Brittney McCoy
On Behalf Of: OALI and McCoy Investigations
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee
On Public Safety
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5031

Good morning,

I am writing to express my strong support for Policy Option Package (POP) 104, which includes an increase in investigator pay for public defense cases to \$75/hour. I also urge you to implement this increase in July 2025 rather than delaying it until January 2026.

I have been a licensed investigator for only 18 months, yet already 35% of my caseload consists of retained cases at a rate of \$120/hour—more than double what we are currently paid for public defense work. While I did not set out to shift my focus away from public defense, the reality is that I have had to take on retained cases because there simply aren't enough licensed investigators to meet the demand for Oregon's criminal defense cases. The severe shortage means investigators can easily find work elsewhere at significantly higher rates. Without competitive pay, this gap will continue to grow, making it even harder to recruit and retain investigators in public defense.

I entered this field because I am passionate about justice and helping people. But as a single mother, financial realities dictate the balance of my caseload. Without a pay increase, I—and many others—will have no choice but to take on fewer OPDC cases in order to sustain a viable career.

In 1985, public defense investigators were paid \$25/hour—the equivalent of \$75/hour today when adjusted for inflation. This increase is not about getting ahead but about restoring pay to where it should have been all along. Without competitive wages, we will continue to lose investigators, worsening the strain on an already struggling public defense system.

With too few investigators, attorneys must take on investigative tasks themselves, greatly reducing efficiency and directly impacting the ability to uphold the Sixth Amendment right to effective counsel. This also comes at a much higher cost to OPDC—attorneys bill at significantly higher rates than investigators, meaning OPDC is ultimately paying more for work that should be done at a lower rate. Raising investigator pay is a necessary step toward resolving Oregon's public defense crisis in both effectiveness and cost efficiency.

Delaying this adjustment by six months will only prolong these challenges. I urge you

to support the immediate implementation of the \$75/hour rate in July 2025 to help attract and retain investigators who are essential to ensuring fair and effective legal representation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Brittney McCoy, PI-ID# 115880