



March 21, 2025

Co-Chair Senator Anthony Broadman  
Co-Chair Representative Paul Evans  
Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety  
900 Court St. NE,  
Salem, Oregon 97301

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

Oregon's public defense crisis is a multifaceted problem that calls for a multifaceted solution. One key element in addressing the crisis is ensuring that new attorneys enter the profession with strong mentorship and the training necessary to meet the demands of this challenging work. Law school clinics are integral to building and training a robust public defender workforce.

During the 2024 Legislative Session, the legislature allocated \$2.1 million in one-time funding to the University of Oregon, Lewis and Clark, and Willamette University Law Schools to provide intensive, structured training and supervision of court certified law students to undertake misdemeanor cases. The clinics are expected to train 60 law students over the course of the academic year to provide public defense services for eligible defendants on over 450 cases.

Our program at Lewis and Clark Law School, in partnership with Metropolitan Public Defender, currently has 11 students, with more coming in the summer term. In just 6 months, we have picked up 205 cases from the unrepresented lists in Multnomah and Washington Counties. Students in their second and third year of law school work closely under the supervision of a professor to represent these clients from intake through trial. They learn how to manage a demanding caseload while having the benefit of close guidance. This is only possible for second year law students because of the clinic model. Certified law student rules mandate that 2Ls can only be certified to appear in court through established clinic programs through a law school. But with this clinic experience and training their 2L year, these students can then work as a certified law student in other public defense offices, including consortia or rural offices their 3L year. This depth of experience is invaluable for students who find their passion for public defense work—a career path they might not have considered otherwise. And as new attorneys, they will have up to two full years of practice and will be able to take on more complicated felony cases much sooner in their careers.

Northwestern School of Law  
of Lewis & Clark College

In order to sustain and expand the impactful work being done through these clinics, we strongly advocate for the continued allocation of \$3.6 million for the coming biennium, either through SB 474 or directly within the Oregon Public Defense Commission's agency budget. Without it, these clinics cannot continue, and this model of multi-year training in law school will be cut off.

We know there is no silver bullet that will solve Oregon's public defense crisis—it is a long-term problem that will require a long-term, multifaceted solution. Our criminal defense legal education clinics are part of that solution today and will continue to be with ongoing funding and support from the legislature.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanna Perini-Abbott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joanna Perini-Abbott  
Executive Director, Lewis & Clark Advocacy Center  
Professor of Practice