



SOUTHERN OREGON PUBLIC DEFENDER

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

My name is Clint Oborn and I have been working in public defense for the past 15 years. Currently, I am serving as the Executive Director of Southern Oregon Public Defender, SOPD for short, a non-profit that trains attorneys and provides exceptional public defense services in Jackson and Josephine Counties and has been doing so since 1985.

The access to justice crisis that many Oregonians have felt is acutely present in Jackson County as more than 700 people await the Constitutional promise of counsel.

Two of the primary issues are: the power to **recruit** and the power to **retain**.

In the last year, SOPD has lost 6 attorneys for two reasons: **higher pay** and **lower caseloads**.

Attracting professionals outside of metropolitan areas is difficult in the best of times. Now along with geographical challenges, we are in direct competition with other parts of the public defense system that are better funded. Just this last week, the OPDC Southern Oregon Trial Division experienced a vacancy in their office and came straight to SOPD looking for recruits. As I speak, OPDC is siphoning another attorney from SOPD recruits to join their ranks. This is the third time in nine months.

Their success is because they offer **Higher Pay** and **Lower Caseloads**. To meet the needs of this crisis, non-profits must be able to retain their attorneys, we need to be able to pay our attorneys commensurate with the state trial division. This requires investing \$19 million more in non-profits. This is the salary gap for non-profit attorneys doing more cases, of the same type of work, as those hired at the state trial division.

SOPD, like other non-profits outside of the law school areas, has become the de facto recruiter to, and trainer for, lawyers in these areas. Recruitment efforts come at a

significant cost to employers. We are not provided the funds that OPDC has been afforded to hire a recruiter, but numbers speak for themselves.

In the last 18 months, SOPD has brought in 5 full-time attorneys, new to public defense, equivalent to approximately 20% of the contracted defense bar in Jackson County. At the same time, 85% of all other current contracted criminal defense attorneys in the County were trained at SOPD. Not to mention ½ the current Judicial District 1 bench.

Non-profit public defender offices are the magnet recruiter for legal professionals away from law school centers. One simple idea: incentivize recruitment by providing grant funds of perhaps \$10,000, to entities that recruit attorneys new to criminal defense practice in Oregon. This would allow entities to reimburse recruitment costs and incentivize recruitment from outside the current system.

Non-profits can provide the long-term solution; we know the issues of **recruitment** and **retention**, and we have the tools to fix this problem. Please help us by making good investments that ensure our ability to retain the attorneys needed to address this crisis in access to justice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clint L. Oborn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Clint L. Oborn
Executive Director
Southern Oregon Public Defender, Inc.