

April 2, 2025

TO: Joint Ways & Means Committee
SUBJECT: Support Nonprofit Public Defenders

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber, Sanchez, Vice-Chairs Girod, Gomberg, Smith, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Vicki Kipp and I am the Chief Investigator at Deschutes Defenders serving Central Oregon. I have worked in public defense for over 13 years.

As someone who works in a nonprofit public defense office, I know firsthand the impacts of quality representation by our integrated teams.

In my current role, I manage countless active cases on behalf of Oregonians whose freedom and future depend on adequate representation.

Last month alone, I reviewed numerous hours of body camera footage, conducted client interviews, served subpoenas, gathered records, photographed evidence, all while assisting attorneys to provide the best defense possible.

As an investigator, I know that our office often does not receive timely and comprehensive discovery and does not have the same information and resources as the prosecution. For example, the prosecutors have access to the National Crime Information Center and can run criminal histories on all witnesses and victims listed on a case. The only way the defense attorney can get the same information is to request it from the prosecutor, and they often refuse to provide it, which is contrary to Oregon Revised Statutes 135.815. Defenders should have access to the exact same information the prosecution has access to; this is unfair treatment.

Nonprofit public defenders are essential to a healthy public safety system. We must close the salary gap or we will see more experienced staff leave and the unrepresented crisis will worsen.

Our communities deserve a legal system that works for everyone, not just those who can afford it. Thank you for your consideration and your commitment to upholding constitutional protections for all Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Vicki Kipp
Bend, Oregon