

Chair Barker, Vice- Chairs Williamson and Olson and members of the committee,

My name is Autumn Shreve and I've been public defender in Multnomah County at Multnomah Defenders (MDI) for just under two years. Before that, I worked for the courts as a clerk to Judge Edward J. Jones (who was the former director of MDI) and for a time I worked on contract case for OPDS. For the year after law school I worked here, at the legislature with your own, Rep Mitch Greenlick.

As is sometimes typical attorneys have a skill for advocating for others and are somewhat less adept at advocating for themselves. So let me do a little advocating for my friends. I say my friends purposefully because I spend most of my waking hours with the people I work with. Many of my friends at the public defender's office don't own a car or were only recently able to afford to own a car. My friends fairly frequently sleep on the floor of their office and they also spend some of their hard-earned money to be able to deal with this job by seeing counselors.

At my office most people are fairly young and nearly everyone we hire has not worked in criminal defense before. It is a training ground for new lawyers and essentially the state is paying to give lawyers an education in trial work only to see them leave public service in search of private work once they are experienced. They leave because they want a job that would allow them to actually build a life and a family, and own a home. This means that the approximate 75% Multnomah County residents charged with a misdemeanor have fairly inexperienced attorneys, on average. I said earlier that I had been at my office for nearly 2 years and in that time 5 new attorneys have been hired at the entry level, having no prior criminal defense experience. This does two things. Number one it makes the system run less efficiently and makes everyone's jobs harder, the prosecutors, the judges, the staff at the courthouse, and the support staff in our offices. And number two it means that other attorneys in our office have to take on greater caseloads as the new attorneys build up from zero clients as they get their bearings. In my 2 years the time it takes me to prepare for a trial or a hearing or an argument has dramatically reduced, experience is a huge benefit and has made my life so much easier. Now I am moving into the new challenge of learning how to handle felony cases, the common progression in public defense.

Let me tell you a little bit more about why attorneys leave. Most of my colleagues are unmarried, don't have kids, and don't own a home. That is how they are able to put in the long hours and accommodate 2 the low pay. Personally, I attended a public university for undergrad and attended the University of Oregon for law school, receiving a small scholarship, and still my student loans are over \$200,000. That amount increases each year even with my \$500 a month payments. My payments are reduced because I qualify for an income-based repayment plan, otherwise my cost would be over \$1000. I'm not unaccustomed to low pay, I've worked for the State and for nonprofits or food service for most of my life. What I'm not accustomed to is the long hours without the compensation to match. I factored a rough estimate of hours worked each week (although frankly I don't really have time to even keep track of how many hours I work). If I work an average around 55 hours a week, my salary means that I'm getting just over \$19 an hour before taxes. I know from working on contract through OPDS that even

people without law degrees, who work on cases under experienced attorneys make \$25 an hour. That is what I made as a brand new lawyer without any experience in the legal field. Also in the last couple weeks, before I took a single day off last Saturday, I was at work for 13 days straight. I currently have 14 of my clients in custody and I have more than nearly 100 other clients.

At my office I am one of the most experienced misdemeanor attorneys, but it has taken this long for me to feel like I'm not struggling to catch up in order to handle all the aspects of indigent representation. I have much more to learn in order to feel confident in the more complex cases for our clients charged with felonies. I believe it will be several more years before I can say I am truly competent to handle all kinds of cases. We want every person that is accused of a crime to have access to an attorney that is competent to handle their case and the system breaks down when all the attorneys that are trained to that level leave public defense. It makes the system less efficient and the cost is a broken criminal justice system.

I believe that if arrested and charged with a crime I would qualify for court-appointed counsel. I think that I deserve to be represented by someone who is experienced and trained and isn't still learning the very intricate practice of criminal defense. Don't get me wrong, I believe that my office cares deeply about our clients and provides the very best that we can, however, the constant struggle and the conversations between me and my friends is that how much more we could be doing. If my office was full of career public defenders, who also would be improving their practice each day and weren't still learning the basics, I think we would all be happier and the clients and the public would be better served. I understand the fiscal impact of this legislation however it is truly a drop in the bucket and would make a huge difference. I urge you to pass HB 2561 out of committee and help to shepherd it through ways and means.

Thank you,

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