



Oregon

Office of Public Defense Services

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The Honorable Floyd Prozanski, Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee, Members

RE: Senate Bill 692

Senate Bill 692 appropriates money to the Public Defense Services Commission to provide funding to Metropolitan Public Defenders to establish and administer a pre-entry pilot program. The purpose of the program is to prepare individuals convicted and sentenced to a term of incarceration by addressing existing legal and financial obligations before the term of incarceration begins. By addressing these obligations before incarceration, a person will be better prepared to re-enter their community following incarceration. The program will integrate social workers with public defense providers to identify and eliminate re-entry barriers before they become obstacles that hinder a person's success after release from state custody.

The Office of Public Defense Services (OPDS) appreciates the work of Sen. Dembrow, the Joint Interim Task Force on Reentry, Employment, and Housing, and others, in developing this program. Public defense attorneys play an important role in our larger public safety system. And their unique relationship with clients affords them an ability to gather sensitive information and direct the person toward stabilizing services. At the same time, social workers have special training and skills to assess needs and navigate social services.

The Public Defense Services Commission (PDSC) continues to investigate innovative and cost-efficient strategies to improve our public defense system. One such strategy is the use of social workers in public defense. The Parent Child Representation Program, a pilot program developed by PDSC, ensures quality legal representation in juvenile dependency cases by establishing caseload limits, improving oversight, and integrating social workers with public defense providers.

In September 2016, OPDS worked with the Joint Interim Committee on the Judiciary, the Oregon State Bar, the Oregon Department of Justice, and others, in assembling a panel of Oregon and national experts on improving outcomes in

public defense cases. Kentucky, for instance, has placed social workers in the offices of public defense providers to work with the accused before trial and identify alternative sentencing options. This approach has proven to be cost-effective.

The PDSC supports the idea of improving representation and outcomes for public defense clients. Defining the metrics to be measured in assessing the work of the program is necessary in order to ensure that the PDSC provides valuable information to the legislature in the required report. The agency understands that an amendment is being developed to address this issue, and appreciates the continued collaboration and effort to include stakeholders in this discussion.

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