



March 19, 2019

Co-Chairs Winters and Piluso and Members of the Committee,

The Fair Shot for All Coalition is a united movement of more than 30 community based organizations and labor unions fighting together for racial, gender and economic justice. We are writing today in support of HB 5532 to make the critical investments in Oregon's Public Defense system needed to ensure that every Oregonian who enters a courtroom has adequate representation.

No matter who we are or how much money we have, all Americans have a constitutional right to zealous legal representation. Those who do not have the aid of a lawyer who has the time, ability and resources to present an effective defense are more likely to be unfairly charged, detained and potentially even deported.

But today in Oregon, public defenders are overloaded with cases, meaning many low-income Oregonians who are disproportionately people of color due to systemic and ongoing racism, are entering the courtroom without adequate representation. To protect the constitutional right to a fair trial and the pursuit of justice, Oregon must ensure everyone has equal access to adequate legal representation.

This legislative session, we have an opportunity to pursue reforms that will create manageable caseloads for public defenders, provide accountability and transparency within the system, and live up to the standard of fairness that our constitution requires.

Through these changes, all Oregonians will experience better outcomes from the public defense system. Most importantly it means low-income Oregonians will have the constitutionally required right to a fair trial but it also means clients and their children and families can better access social workers, mental health resources, and other wrap-around services helping to prevent them from entering a downward spiral. And we all benefit from reduced recidivism and the associated cost-savings in the system when people are treated fairly.

Without investing in the structural and institutional reforms needed within our public defense system, we will continue to create and exacerbate economic and other barriers for people of color, LGBTQ Oregonians, low-income communities, those experiencing homelessness, and others disproportionately represented in the system. Thank you for your consideration of the increased investments for our Public Defense Services in HB 5532.

About Fair Shot For All - Fair Shot for All is made up of AFT Oregon, Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, Basic Rights Oregon, Bus Project, Causa Oregon, Coalition of Communities of Color, Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT), Family Forward Oregon, Forward Together, Health Care for All, NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon, Northwest Workers' Justice Project, Oregon AFL-CIO, Oregon AFSCME, Oregon Education Association, Oregon Latino Health Coalition (OLHC), Oregon National Organization for Women, Oregon Nurses Association, Oregon Student Association, Partnership for Safety and Justice, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon, Portland Jobs with Justice, Rural Organizing Project, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Unite Oregon, Urban League of Portland, Voz Workers' Rights Education Project, and the YWCA.