



AFSCME Member Testimony in Support of HB 3145

Chair Williamson, Vice-chairs Gorsek and Sprenger, and members of the committee.

My name is Audrey Engle and I am a Social Work Case Manager, represented by AFSCME Local 3668, at Metropolitan Public Defender. Thank you for this time today to testify in support of HB 3145.

Social work services are new at Metropolitan Public Defender – it's a program that's only been in effect here for a little over a year. But they are not new around the country. In adding social work advocates to the public defense team, we are joining leaders in public defense best practices across the United States.

In our office, the social work team members meet with clients to conduct a strengths-needs assessment and create an action plan. We build relationships, help connect clients to resources in the community, and accompany them throughout the duration of their legal case. Social work advocates support the defense attorney's work by building trust, facilitating communication, gathering additional information, and keeping clients engaged in the process. We attend settlement conferences to help our clients present their plans for change and share mitigating information that helps attorneys to secure better sentencing outcomes.

As social work advocates, we are able to engage with our clients in a unique way. We use evidence-based practices to build therapeutic relationships with our clients and partner with them in building more motivation for change. In a punitive system that tends to focus on what is wrong with people and what makes them unlikely to succeed, our social work advocates seek to engage with our clients as a whole person – noticing and highlighting the good things, the social supports, everything the client has going for them, as well as supporting clients in identifying their own goals and building their own motivation for change. Instead of telling people what they need to do, we give people the space to tell us what they know they need to do to turn their lives around, and we accompany them towards that goal. We know that as human beings we are more likely to make real, lasting changes in our lives when we are motivated by reasons we identify for ourselves.

When people feel empowered to create change for themselves, they are more likely to make those changes and the changes are more likely to last. If the goal of the justice system is truly justice, and not just punishment, then providing the support that people need to make real change is crucial for allowing people to move forward with their lives and avoid future trouble with the law.

Our program is currently a two-person operation, grant-funded through Multnomah County Justice Reinvestment. We serve men under the age of 24, and all women, who are going through the justice reinvestment process. With only two of us, the number of people we are able to work with is limited.



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We cannot possibly serve all of the people who would benefit from having a social work advocate on their defense team.

Social work advocates are integral to the future of public defense. It's my vision for the social work program to grow and expand within Metropolitan Public Defender and other public defense firms, and to become a resource that can serve any client who would benefit from extra support. I ask you to support this bill and to fully fund the groundbreaking work that social work advocates are doing in the public defense system. Thank you.