

3 February 2020

To: Chair Tawna Sanchez and members of the House Judiciary Committee

Subject: Oregon NOW support for HB4004, a bill for reform of the Oregon public defender system

National Organization for Women Oregon Chapter (Oregon NOW) expresses its support for HB4004 in the Oregon 2020 legislative session.

The 2019 report *The Right to Counsel in Oregon* published by the Sixth Amendment identified this issue as one of several critical concerns:

The complex bureaucracy obscures an attorney compensation plan that is at root a fixed fee contract system that: pits appointed lawyers' financial self-interest against the due process rights of their clients; and is prohibited by national public defense standards.¹

HB4004 is a step toward resolving this particular problem by directing changes to reform the compensation and workload policies employed in the public defender system in Oregon.

Oregon NOW sees deficiencies in the public defender system as an economic justice issue for women because of continuing economic inequities for women in our society. Women, particularly single women with dependents, are less likely to be able to afford private counsel than their male counterparts. For women of color and members of the LGBTQIA community, the impacts are even greater.

As a member of the Fair Shot for All coalition, Oregon NOW supported HB3145 in the 2019 legislative session. While additional funding for the public defender system was allocated in the 2019 session, no progress was made toward reform of the underlying system. We now support HB4004 as an initial step toward achieving the reforms that will make our justice system more equitable for all.

Please work to advance this important legislation.

Respectfully,



Christine Chin Ryan
President, Oregon NOW

¹ *The Right to Counsel in Oregon: Evaluation of Trial Level Public Defense Representation Provided through the Office of Public Defense Services*, Sixth Amendment Center, Boston, MA, January, 2019
[\[https://sixthamendment.org/6AC/6AC_Oregon_report_2019.pdf\]](https://sixthamendment.org/6AC/6AC_Oregon_report_2019.pdf)