

Meyer Stephenson

Employment Law

Christina Stephenson
Attorney at Law

1 SW Columbia St., Suite 1850, Portland, OR 97258
E: christina@oregonworkplacelaw.com
P: 503-459-4010 F: 503-512-5022

February 4, 2020

Via Email

House Committee on Judiciary

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 4004

Chair Sanchez and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 4004. As a civil rights attorney, I know that access to quality legal representation and a fair trial is paramount to ensuring that our court systems have the opportunity to be impartial and transparent, regardless of one's socio-economic status.

The sixth amendment establishes that everyone has access to a fair trial, however, studies have shown that Oregon's current system lacks the tools necessary to ensure that public defenders are empowered to provide the quality representation that they strive to provide. Additionally, the lack of sufficient public defenders in our legal system impacts low-income and communities of color at a disproportionate rate and further exacerbates systematic racism within our criminal justice system. House Bill 4004 is a step in the right direction for addressing these disparities within Oregon's criminal justice system identified by the [Sixth Amendment Center's Oregon Report](#).

This bill will also ensure more diversity on the Public Defense Services Commission by adding two more members to the commission and modifying guidelines for membership to ensure that one member is a former public defender and another member is a person who has been represented by a public defender. The commission will also work to create caseloads and structures based on region and need, so that the caps reflect their specific community's needs.

Oregon is in need of broader, holistic criminal justice reform that recognizes we should invest in wrap-around services that support communities and keep them from interacting with the court system in the first instance. House Bill 4004 will help move us forward towards a system where everyone has access to justice. I urge a "yes" vote.

Sincerely,
Christina Stephenson