



Dear Chairs Bynum and Prozanski and members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to continue the conversation on public defense and checking in with AFSCME and our partners on engagement and next steps planning. Oregon AFSCME Council remains ready to continue this important work on behalf of our members represented by Local 2435 and Local 2435-1, the Appellate Division and the support staff at the Office of Public Defense Service (OPDS); Local 2805 representing attorneys and staff at Multnomah Defenders, Inc; Local 3668 representing attorneys and staff at Metropolitan Public Defender; and the recently organized attorneys at Public Defender of Marion County and others soon to be announced.

During the 2021 legislative session, AFSCME, OCDLA and ODCA had proposed an amendment to HB 2003 that outlined a stakeholder engagement process to plan next steps for modernizing our public defense system. Although the amendment was not adopted, OPDS assured us that there would be a stakeholder engagement process. OPDS staff met with AFSCME, OCDLA and ODCA and proposed a robust, comprehensive, and ongoing stakeholder engagement plan.

It may be understandable, given the multiple hiring processes that OPDS has been conducting, that it has been difficult to get the stakeholder engagement process fully implemented. However, this is one of several areas where better communication and outreach to partners would have kept the work moving.

It was not until receiving the invitation to present to the joint meeting of House and Senate Judiciary, that my partners in this work and I learned that the Coraggio Group would be handling the stakeholder engagement process. However, it is unclear when this work will begin and if the process will look anything like the robust plan that was presented to us this spring and if it will include work that has already been done through a stakeholder process such as the Contract Enhancement Workgroup.

Reforming our public defense services is too important to not have open and clear communication and partnerships with stakeholders. Too much time has already been lost since the release of the [Sixth Amendment Center's report on Oregon's trial level public defense services](#). We cannot let any more slip away from us. The crushing caseloads are now significantly worse and our contractors of trial level services continue to have high rates of turnover. We are losing dedicated and experienced staff and attorneys who can no longer keep up with the workload. This has profound and lifetime impacts on the people they represent and will have lasting effects on many other services in our state.

Oregon AFSCME Council 75, our public defense members, and I think it is safe for me to say our partners at OCDLA are ready and more than willing to get a process in place and working.

In Unity,

[Eva Rippeteau](#)
Political Coordinator

