



# Oregon Public Defense Attorney Student Loan Survey 2022

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# Background

- American Bar Association consistently reports on the impact of education loans among lawyers entering the profession\*
- Oregon Project Report (Jan. 2022) provides an analysis of the Oregon public defense system's historical staffing and caseloads\*\*
- Rep. Bynum, Chair, House Committee on Judiciary requested the Legislative Policy and Research Office (LPRO) to solicit information from public defenders in Oregon specific to **student loan debt**
- LPRO staff created a brief online six closed-ended anonymous questionnaire
- Fielded the questionnaire via Office of Public Defense Services (OPDS) Listserve
  - **156 responses** (as of 5pm Feb. 9)

\*American Bar Association and AccessLex Institute (2021). Selected Findings from the 2021 American Bar Association (ABA) Young Lawyers Division Student Loan Survey. Available at: [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/young\\_lawyers/2021-student-loan-survey.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/young_lawyers/2021-student-loan-survey.pdf)

\*\*American Bar Association and MOSSADAMS (January 2022). *The Oregon Project: An Analysis of the Oregon Public Defense System and Attorney Workload Standards*. Available at: [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal\\_aid\\_indigent\\_defendants/lis-sclaid-or-proj-rept.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_aid_indigent_defendants/lis-sclaid-or-proj-rept.pdf)

# Questionnaire

- What business structure describes your current practice?
- What is the ZIP code where your office is located?
- Do you work full time? (yes/no)
- How much of your work time do you spend on public defense representation, on average over the course of 12 months?
- Do you have outstanding student debt? (yes/no)
- How much student debt do you have?

# Results

**Table 1. Number of Survey Respondents by Business Structure**



<b>Business Structure</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Employed at a non-profit	96	61.5%
Employed at a government agency	17	10.9%
Solo practitioner	15	9.6%
Employed at a private law firm of 2-5 attorneys	12	7.7%
Other	6	3.8%
Independent contractor	5	3.2%
Employed at a private law firm of more than 10 attorneys	3	1.9%
Employed at a private law firm of 6-10 attorneys	2	1.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

*Source: Legislative Policy and Research Office  
Data: 2022 Oregon Public Defender Student Debt Survey*



# Results

**Table 2. Number of Survey Respondents by Full Time Status**

Employed Full Time	Count	Percent
Yes	151	96.8%
No	5	3.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Legislative Policy and Research Office

Data: 2022 Oregon Public Defender Student Debt Survey

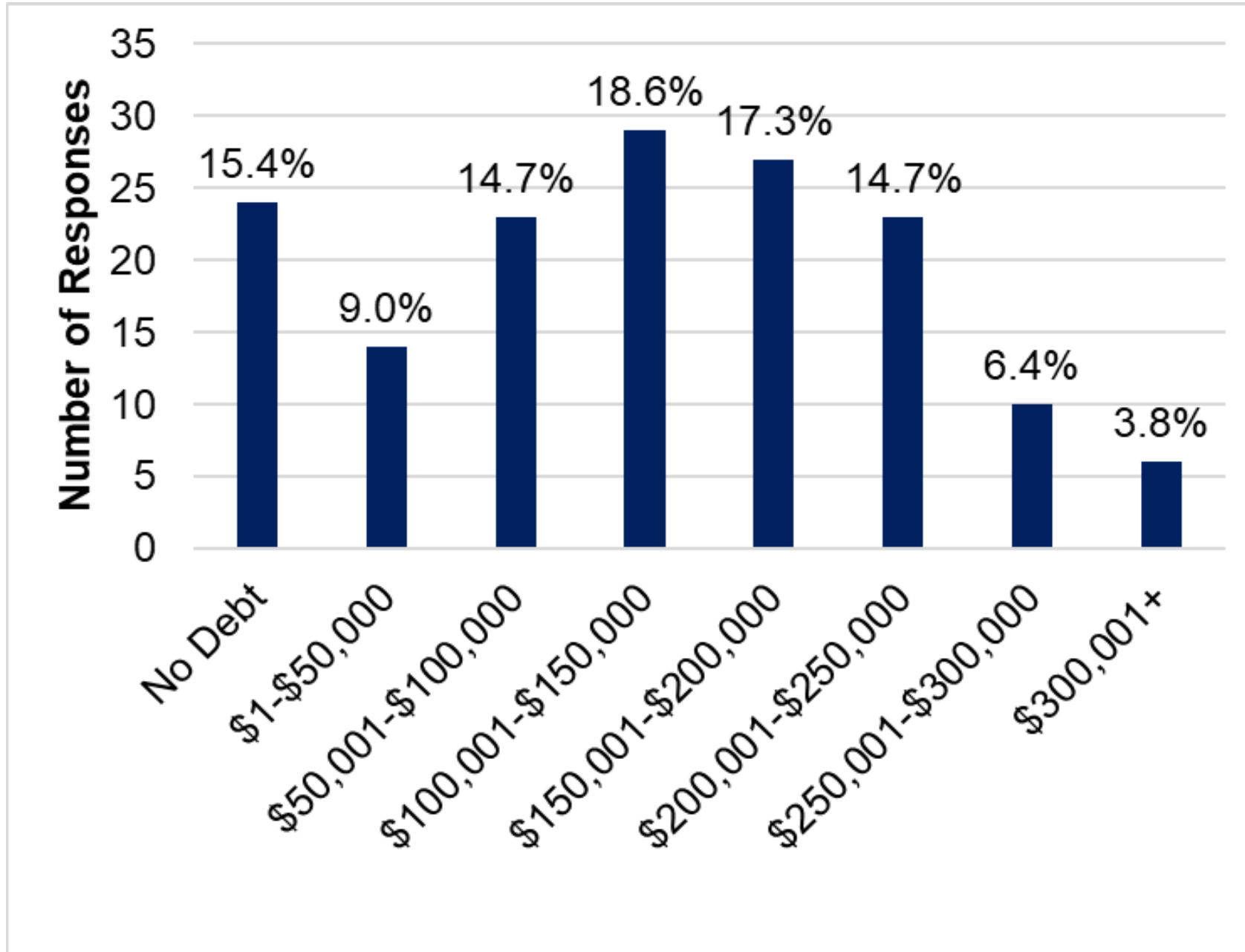
**Table 3. Number of Survey Respondents by Percent of Time Spent on Public Defense**

	Count	Percent
Less than 25%	4	2.6%
At least 25%, but less than 50%	3	1.9%
At least 50%, but less than 75%	5	3.2%
At least 75%, but less than 100%	15	9.6%
100%	129	82.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

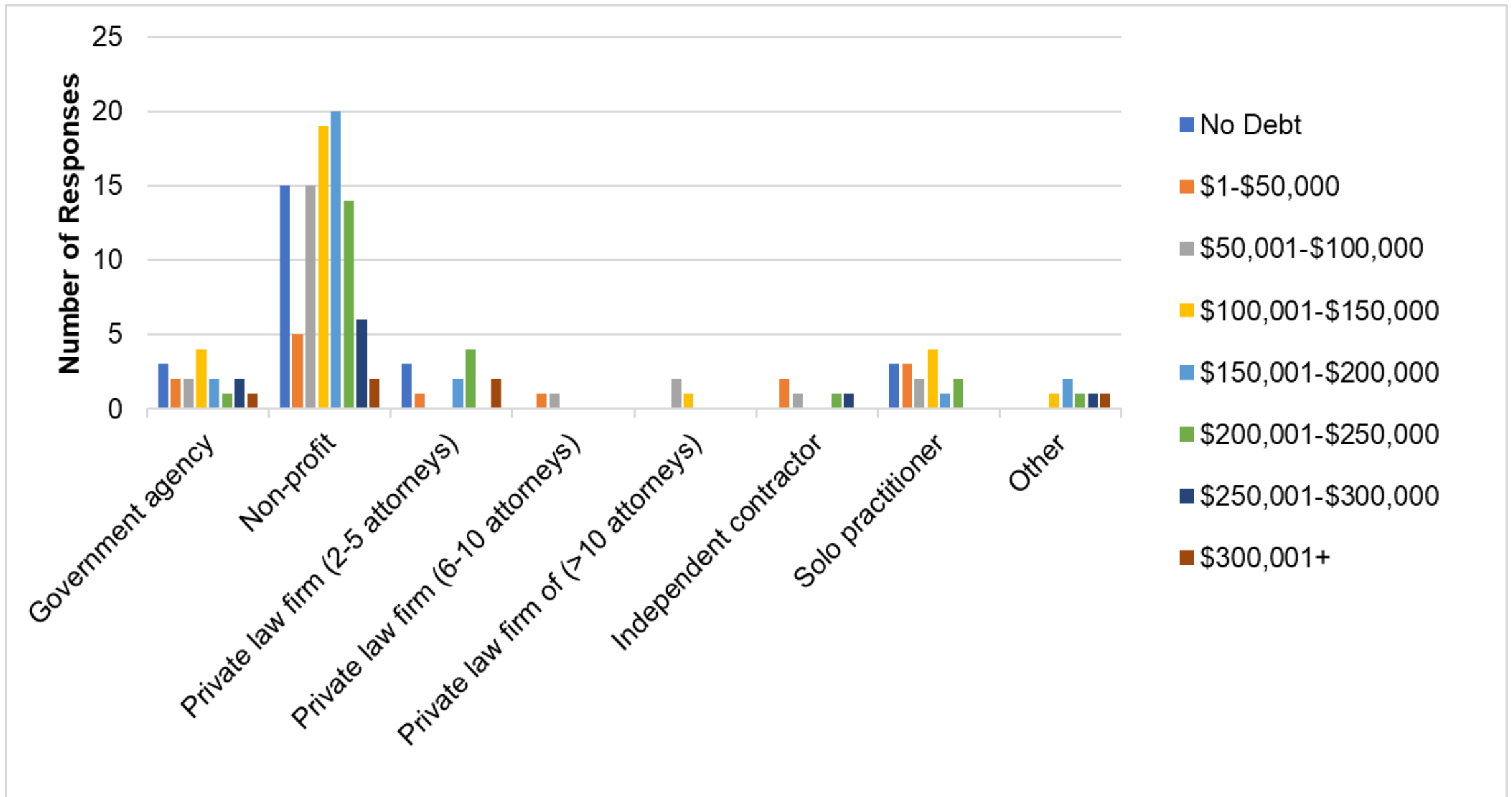
Source: Legislative Policy and Research Office

Data: 2022 Oregon Public Defender Student Debt Survey

**Figure 1. Survey Responses by Amount of Student Debt**



## Figure 2. Business Structure and Student Debt



# Questionnaire Limitations

- Generalizability (156 responses) among an estimated 800+ public defenders (~20% response rate).
- Limited to six closed-ended questions, fielded for <48 hours.
- Did not ask for demographic data or ask if the student debt reported is entirely attributable to obtaining a law degree or also inclusive of an undergraduate or post-graduate degree.
- Respondents were not asked if they were aware of or enrolled in the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program or the Oregon State Bar Loan Repayment Assistance Program.
- Information gathered is descriptive in nature and should not be used to draw assumptions or conclusions about factors contributing to Oregon's public defense workforce shortage.



Thank you!  
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