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Via Electronic Mail

Re: HB 4007

Dear Elected Officials:

I am a public defense provider in Union County, Oregon. I live and work in La Grande, which is located approximately 4 hours east of Portland and 2.5 hours west of Boise. I am a member of our local public defense consortia, contracting with Oregon Public Defense Services ("OPDS") to provide indigent defense in both Union and Wallowa counties.

I am writing to urge you to pass HB 4007 with a provision that allows public defenders to apply for this program and receive financial assistance for any attorney who dedicates 50% or more of their time to providing indigent defense. Young attorneys who are just starting out frequently begin with a small share of consortia cases, perhaps .5 FTE or so. In order to sustain a private practice in rural eastern Oregon, it is necessary to take on private cases. Doing so allows us to maintain our law practice while providing much needed legal services to our communities. The public defense attorneys in rural Oregon tend to be the only attorneys in their respective counties who handle criminal defense, juvenile defense, and juvenile dependency work. There are very few attorneys who do not have a contract with OPDS and who specialize in these areas of the law.

The program HB 4007 seeks to implement would be invaluable for our rural indigent defense providers. As I am sure you are aware, the American Bar Association came out with a report indicating that Oregon has one third of the public defense providers it needs. I am proud that I was able to partake in that study and confident that the results will be used to ensure public defenders are fairly compensated and have appropriate caseloads. There are a lot of difficult issues that need to be worked through as a result of the ABA report. One decision that should not be difficult is to extend as much financial aid as possible to the attorneys doing this amazing work. We can accomplish this by making sure HB 4007 allows public defenders who dedicate 50% or more of their time to providing indigent defense to apply for this program and receive financial assistance repaying their student loans.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michelle B." followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Michelle Bartov, OSB# 164975