

Submitter: Jamie Pruitt
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure: HB4007

Chair Bynum, Vice Chairs Noble and Power, Members of the Committee,

I want to thank you for your support of public defense.

My outstanding student loan debt, from law school only, is over \$200,000, as I graduated in 2006 when the housing market was crashing and the attorney job market was not thriving. After running a solo law practice for ten years and exploring other areas of law for a few more years, I returned to criminal defense after being recruited by a colleague to come to Oregon to work as a public defender. A primary consideration in exploring this was the public service loan forgiveness program. I am the primary breadwinner for my family and we live on a modest income. Unfortunately, my caseload became overwhelming at times and the stress of this made me question if public defense was worth the loan forgiveness if I had to practice for ten years to see any benefit- something that seems completely unsustainable given the tremendous amount of stress and secondary trauma public defenders have to endure while accepting lower salaries than our counterparts in this system.

I support the proposed loan payment program, as it could make tremendous impact on people's loans payments, while not making them commit to ten years of work before receiving a meaningful financial benefit. This program could allow for better recruitment and retention of public defense attorneys. While I may not continue in public defense and will likely never see a benefit from this program, a program like this would have enticed me to stay longer, had it been enacted earlier. I hope this program will go into effect soon and will help public defense providers with their loan payments. It will also be a great model for other states who may be looking for more ways to support public defenders.

Thank you, Representative Bynum, for proposing this legislation.

Sincerely,

Jamie T. Pruitt
Public Defender Services of Lane County