



February 11, 2022

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

Thank you so much for the opportunity, and thank you for raising up this legislative concept.

A state loan forgiveness program for those in public defense services could certainly be a long term tool for recruiting and retaining much needed attorneys and should include support staff. Many of the trial assistants, support staff, investigators, and social workers who make public defense functional also carry significant student debt, and the salary hit that they take to work in public service is just as significant as the lawyers'.

To finance law school, I took out \$82,000 in debt, plus a few thousand carried over from my undergraduate education. In ten years I've paid off my undergraduate debt and have paid \$20,191.79 against my law school debt. That amount represents a fixed percentage of my income, totaling about \$500, as of March 2020. That's less than the interest on the loans, which explains how my law school debt has gone up to \$108,766.81.

I've been very lucky. I share an affordable apartment, and my job keeps me busy enough that I don't have expensive hobbies. But that security was slow to come. In my first couple of years I was in really dire straits. The Oregon State Bar's Loan Repayment Assistance Program was a huge relief - but only for three years, followed by more lean times. When COVID hit, and the federal government suspended student loan repayment, I didn't know what to do. I come from suspicious people, at least as far as government largesse goes, so my first instinct was to sock it all away, because of course someone would demand it all back.



Instead, I'm putting it into a house. It's a bit of a gamble. I've earned some raises since my last payment, so I know that when my payments restart, it'll be more than \$500. One calculator says \$600, another says \$800. My loans also just moved, so I'll have to wait while my loan servicer sorts it out. I've made peace with the fact that I may not be able to stay in my chosen profession, and that part of that is out of my hands.

HB 4007 will make it easier to be a public defender and to stay a public defender, particularly for those of us who are burning out from crushing caseloads and needing to take on more complex cases earlier in our careers.

Others who have provided testimony have also pointed out the need to adequately fund public defense services as a whole. So, yes, thank you for providing this concept and please help us get the policies and funding that gets us the nearly 1300 additional public defense attorneys and as well as the staffing that support us providing effective counsel advocacy for our clients.

Thank you,  
Charlie Peirson  
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