

December 11, 2024

Co-Chairs Prozanski and Kropf and Member of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response:

Oregon faces a severe public defense crisis. One key element to addressing the crisis is ensuring we have attorneys able to enter the profession who have been mentored and are prepared to tackle the demands of this challenging work and manage the caseloads.

During the February 2024 Session, the legislature allocated a total of \$2.1 million to the University of Oregon, Lewis and Clark, and Willamette University Law Schools to provide intensive, structured training and supervision of court certified law students to undertake misdemeanor cases. Each law school now has a new criminal defense clinical legal education program operating with students enrolled in the clinics. Per the budget note associated with this funding, the clinics are expected to train a total of 60 law students per year to provide public defense services for eligible defendants for between 300 to 400 misdemeanor cases. We are happy to report we are on track to meet these targets.

As we near the end of our first term, we have 30 students enrolled in clinics in Lane, Multnomah, Marion, and Washington Counties who have provided public defense services on 213 cases. Students who are in the clinics today have already assisted with the current backlog of cases and will graduate misdemeanor certified—able to handle HB 4002 cases day-one on the job. As we forecast into the next semester and summer, we expect to have a total of 60 students enrolled in the clinics and 450-500 cases managed—exceeding the legislature’s expected targets.

By creating well-trained graduates with experience in and commitment to public defense, our clinics will increase the pipeline of law students who pursue careers in public defense¹ and instill the confidence needed to help them remain in this career long term.

We know there is no silver bullet that will solve Oregon’s public defense crisis—it is a long-term problem that will require a long-term, multi-faceted solution. Our criminal defense legal education clinics are part of the solution today and will continue to be with ongoing funding support from the legislature.



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¹From UO law school’s class of 2022, 11 of the 15 graduates of the Criminal Defense Clinic reported accepting a position in criminal defense.