



# METROPOLITAN PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES, INC.

January 27, 2023

Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: Testimony in Support of SB 579

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit the following testimony in support of SB 579. I am the Executive Director of Metropolitan Public Defender (MPD), which is the single largest provider of public defense services in the State of Oregon. MPD maintains offices in both Multnomah and Washington counties. MPD has a total of over 200 team members, more than half of which are attorneys. We represent individuals charged with adult criminal offenses in both counties, juvenile delinquency and dependency matters, specialty treatment courts, and civil commitment hearings. Our office also has a Capital Crimes Team (which represents individuals charged with death penalty eligible offenses and homicide charges statewide) and a grant-funded Community Law Division (which represents individuals in civil matters related to the criminal justice system). MPD has represented some of the most vulnerable and disenfranchised members of our State since 1971.

The right to vote is a fundamental right enshrined in our Constitution. Due to racism, sexism, and oppression from the founding of our country, many people have risked their lives to obtain and ensure their right to vote. We know the racist underpinnings of preventing someone with a felony conviction to vote, and the disparities within our criminal legal system. SB 579 is one more step toward progress, and eroding the intentional disenfranchisement of people who are low-income, Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

Studies show that over 95% of people who are incarcerated will be released and will return to their communities. It is critically important that we do our part to ensure that each stay engaged in our communities. The decisions that the legislature and other elected officials make, have a significant impact on people in the criminal legal system. Their voices need to be heard, and one way to do so, is through their vote.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB 579.

Sincerely,

*Carl Macpherson*

Carl Macpherson  
Executive Director  
Metropolitan Public Defender