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Co-Chair Sollman, Co-Chair Evans, and Members of the Committee,

Public Defenders of Oregon (PDO), a nonprofit 501(c)4, was founded in summer of 2022, in response to the overwhelming and urgent need to advocate for high quality and stable public defense services, to build and retain a strong public defense workforce, and to equitably center the needs of all clients through effective and ethical representation.

**Who We Are**

The 10 Nonprofit Public Defender offices in Oregon:

- Operate in 14 counties in Oregon: Multnomah, Washington, Marion, Lane, Douglas, Jackson, Josephine, Coos, Deschutes, Umatilla, Grant, Baker, Harney, and Malheur.
- Provide approximately one third of all public defender representation in the state, serving thousands of clients per year.
- Employ approximately 215 public defense attorneys, as well as almost another 200 hundred support staff, half of whom are union-represented by AFSCME.
- Are exclusively dedicated to public defense, handling only court appointed cases and no additional private cases.
- Recruit and train the overwhelming majority of new public defenders into the profession.

As Public Defenders from across Oregon, we write to express our support for renewing funding for the Criminal Justice Commission's Restorative Justice Grant Program. In 2022, this grant program funded eight restorative justice programs across the state, most of which are in the development or pilot phase. These programs have huge potential, as data from other restorative justice programs from other states demonstrates high efficacy rates regarding survivor satisfaction and reduction in recidivism. The costs of restorative justice are also dramatically lower when compared to the criminal legal system. We ask that the legislature continue its investment in this important and promising system alternative and allow these programs to reach their full potential. Doing so will benefit our clients, crime survivors, and the community as a whole.

Restorative justice offers a powerful alternative to the current system. Incarceration is highly traumatizing and often leads to increased recidivism because of the harm people experience inside jails and prisons and the lack of support they receive upon release. The stigma and collateral consequences that accompany a criminal conviction further isolate these individuals from their community and create barriers to their reentry. By addressing root causes

and empowering people who have committed crimes to repair the harm they have caused, restorative justice creates better outcomes for our clients, crime survivors, and the community.

Another unique and important feature of restorative justice is its ability to inspire true internal accountability within people who have caused harm. They become active participants in their own accountability by working closely with facilitators to understand the impact of their crime, develop empathy, and prepare for a dialogue with those they harmed. The dialogue allows people who have caused harm to hear directly from those they have harmed, to answer their questions, and work collaboratively in the creation of a plan to repair or heal the harm they caused to the individual, to their community, and to themselves. People who have caused harm then take action to repair that harm by completing the plan, which, in turn, empowers participants to see that they can make things right and be an important part of the community. This approach differs strongly from the criminal legal system, which inhibits charged individuals from discussing the impact of their actions with loved ones and especially with the person they harmed. The system also disincentivizes people from admitting wrongdoing, as doing so can damage their case and lead to higher penalties. This prevents people who have caused harm from reckoning with their actions and prevents harmed parties from obtaining information that is integral to the healing process.

For all these reasons and more, we believe the Restorative Justice Grant program is deeply important to Oregon's criminal justice reform efforts and to its efforts to create safer communities. We ask that Oregon maintain its commitment to the counties that are currently engaged in developing and implementing these programs, while allowing other counties the opportunity to advance similar initiatives.

Sincerely,



Stacey Lowe, President of PDO