

Submitter: Mark Lang
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure: SB337

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary:

My Name is Mark Lang and I am the administrator for the public defense consortium, Justice Alliance of Columbia County (JACC). We provide indigent defense services in Columbia County and PCRP representation in Clatsop and Columbia Counties. My law firm provides legal representation through a contract with JACC, I am writing you today because it has come to my understanding that there is a proposal to eliminate the consortiums by July 2025. I can understand that my letter may be viewed as self-serving, but I am asking that this proposal not be considered.

I understand that there is a perception that there is little to no oversight of the consortiums and that consortiums are inferior methods in providing public defense. I really do not understand those perceptions because that has not been my experience. I was a prosecutor for nine years in Clatsop County and public defense is provided by the consortium system there. I have been working in public defense within consortiums since the end of 2013. What I have observed has been a highly effective system that works very well in rural communities. I cannot speak to the metro areas, but the local consortiums have developed very high caliber legal talent. Some of the best defense attorneys I have seen are connected to the consortium system. We are also sending monthly reports to OPDS of time records and case information. We have also provided services to other counties when asked by OPDS.

There is a lot of mentoring that goes on between the attorneys of the consortium. We will have meetings and discuss changes in the law and issues each of us may be facing. I bring concerns from the attorneys in our group to the attention of the trial court administrators and judges and I feel we are heard by them. The consortiums are relied on by the court systems, jail, and the community to be the voice of the voiceless. Jail leadership will often contact me to get input of what is working and not working. We have been able to get better treatment and services to our clients because our consortium has the respect of the systems and the community. The judges will let me know if there are concerns with attorneys. That allows me to act fast if there are concerns. Consortiums provides the essential leadership and input of the treatment courts. I will attend national and state trainings on behalf of our attorneys. I then share that information with our attorneys. The treatment courts would not be where they are at without the leadership of the consortiums. I am the vice chair of the LPSCC in Columbia County because of the consortiums. I am very proud of the team we have developed in Clatsop and Columbia Counties.

I really do not know what will happen if the consortiums cease to exist in 2025. Dismantling consortiums in two years is a huge gamble and creates a huge question of what would happen to public defense and legal access in rural communities. We are getting the work done and we are extremely efficient. I appreciate your time and attention.