

**Testimony Submitted by
Hanna Osman, Policy Researcher/Analyst
Oregon Consumer Justice
To the House and Senate Committees on Judiciary**

03/29/2023

Regarding: Support for SB 413, SB 337, HB 2467

Chair Chairs Kropf and Prozanski and members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees,

For the record, my name is Hanna Osman, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of Oregon Consumer Justice today in support of SB 413, SB 337, and HB 2467.

Oregon Consumer Justice (OCJ) organizes, advocates, and supports litigation to advance a justice movement that puts people first, ensuring all have the freedom to thrive and equitably share in our abundance of resources. For too long, flawed systems and economic policies that favor profits over people have stood in the way of this reality, with communities of color most often experiencing the most significant harm. Strengthened through responsive and reciprocal community relationships, OCJ is building a future where financial and business transactions can be relied upon as safe and where all Oregonians know and have recourse to exercise their consumer rights.

All individuals in Oregon who are accused of a crime are entitled to sufficient and efficient legal representation as guaranteed by the Constitution, regardless of their identity or financial status. However, numerous Oregon residents are presently in a state of uncertainty because the state administration has not fulfilled its constitutional obligation to provide adequate legal representation to those who are unable to hire a private lawyer. Inadequate funding for our public defense system renders it difficult to achieve justice. Promoting and sustaining our public defense system is a crucial measure towards a more equitable and fair Oregon.

The American Bar Association found that Oregon only has about one-third of the public defense attorneys necessary to meet current service needs.

Merely increasing salaries is insufficient to resolve this deeply ingrained problem. We must employ a range of strategies to stabilize, develop, and maintain our workforce. These legislative proposals address the issue by raising compensation, managing workloads, and implementing a program to repay student loans. Implementing a blend of these approaches will assist us in recruiting new attorneys and retaining experienced ones. By decreasing workloads, we can provide better representation, reduce errors, and avoid exhaustion and employee turnover.

SB 413, SB 337, and HB 2467 include important investments and reforms to begin addressing the immediate crisis while building toward a more sustainable and just system which include the following:

- HB 2467 and SB 413 focus on workforce recruitment and retention by ensuring pay for providers is at a commensurate level with state employees who provide similar services
- HB 2467 and SB 413 allow for the Office of Public Defense Services to administer grants to law schools in Oregon to support law students working in public defense and establish apprenticeship programs and other recruitment programs. It also allows for the office to provide grants to contractors of public defense for recruitment of attorneys.
- HB 2467 and SB 413 also establish a loan repayment program through the Oregon State Bar that would allow for attorneys and staff of public defense services in Oregon to apply for grants to cover the costs of student loans during their 10 years of service needed for federal loan forgiveness.

No one in Oregon should face criminal charges without access to an attorney. Together, we can rebuild our public defense system to ensure fairness and root out racism and classism. Please vote yes on SB 413, SB 337, and HB 2467.

Thank you for your consideration and your service to Oregon's communities.