

March 29, 2023

Dear Senators:

My name is Jonathan Sarre. I am the administrator of the Portland Defense Consortium (PDC) and also a full time defense provider. The Portland Defense Consortium contracts with the Office of Public Defense Services to provide defense lawyers to individuals charged with the most serious felony crimes including Murder, sexual crimes and other Ballot Measure 11 offenses in Multnomah County. Our fifteen attorneys possess collectively hundreds of years of experience in the practice of criminal law, most are qualified to handle murder cases and all our lawyers put the overwhelming majority of that expertise to work for our court-appointed clients.

PDC has been contracting with OPDS for twenty years. We currently consist of three law firms and four solo practitioners. PDC attorneys handle the vast majority of homicide cases in Multnomah County. We represent some of the most notorious defendants in the busiest court system in the State.

We are comprised of small business owners and employees of small businesses. The firms and solo attorneys employ legal assistants, paralegals and hire free-lance investigators and experts to help defend the people we are assigned to. PDC lawyers are active in the local bar and serve on a multitude of groups that address the efficient operation of the criminal side of our court system. Our attorneys are committed to their work and also place great value on the independence that comes with being part of an organization like ours.

It is the overwhelming consensus of our membership, as well as that of consortia members statewide whom I have spoken with, that SB 337 is a misguided attempt to address the serious issues in Oregon public defense. If the Legislature were to eliminate organizations like PDC, some of our attorneys will transition into hourly providers but some, however, will either retire prematurely or cease doing indigent defense work.

PDC attorneys also currently staff specialty courts in Multnomah County. Developing and maintaining a specialty court requires both a great deal of up front planning as well as regular contact with the court and community stakeholders. Our attorneys participate in that process. They bring their experience to bear in this area as well. If consortia were to be eliminated, these vital functions will suffer from the loss of institutional memory.

As contract administrator, not only do I liaison with OPDS, I also am the consortium's point of contact for the local bench and court administration. I also participate in numerous policy discussions, attend regular meetings involving the Justice Reinvestment Program and have been heavily involved finding qualified attorneys to represent those folks in our county who are without legal representation. From talking with my counterparts throughout the state, this is a common (and often overlooked) "non-job description" of consortia administrators. In the proposed system of not-for-profit public defense firms and individual attorneys, we will lose the benefit of these practitioners' experience and problem solving skills.

In closing, SB 337 as currently proposed contemplates eliminating organizations who perform approximately 60% of public defense in Oregon. This will exacerbate, not solve, our current crisis in public defense. Consortia have long been a vital cog in our system. PDC, for one, was the sole entity

providing public defense in Multnomah County continuing to take on new clients during and throughout the covid 19 crisis. More than one Multnomah County judge has expressed their appreciation to me over the last couple years for the work we do. PDC was also the only Multnomah County provider singled out by out-going Chief Justice Walters for our contributions. While we appreciate and are touched by compliments, we would much rather continue to provide the people of Oregon with high quality legal representation.

Jonathan T. Sarre