



To: House Committee on Judiciary

RE: Support of HB 2467

Chair Kropf, Vice Chairs Andersen and Wallan, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to advocate for HB 2467 to support the workforce providing public defense services in Oregon and ensure that all Oregonians seeking access to fair representation and due process can obtain quality services.

My name is Sol Mora and I am the Advocacy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC). We are an alliance of culturally specific community-based organizations dedicated to cross-cultural collective action for racial justice. CCC strives to address institutional racism and economic disparities within our local and state systems and create viable pathways for communities of color, immigrants, and refugees to obtain self-determination, justice, and access to opportunities.

The current state of Oregon's chronically under-resourced public defense infrastructure negatively affects both the individuals seeking public defense services and the workforce of public defenders. This lack of robust public defense services is especially detrimental to the wellbeing of communities of color who are disproportionately arrested and convicted at higher rates than white Oregonians. Oftentimes, the limited access to services and the backlog of cases forces individuals to make the difficult decision to accept plea bargains, rather than moving through due process, a decision which no one should have to make. Additionally, public defenders are juggling unreasonable caseloads and are not able to provide the level of quality and comprehensive services they could if conditions were better. These excessive caseloads, in combination with unlivable wages, are leading to burnout among public defenders and causing many to leave the field altogether to seek a more sustainable profession.

The American Bar Association released a report pointing to the chronic lack of public defense services, in which they found that Oregon only has one third of the attorneys it needs to adequately provide representation to the Oregonians who need it, leaving two thirds of those seeking services without access. At a moment in which our state is in dire need of more public defenders and services, we must advance policies that will help to retain individuals in this profession and create new pathways for those considering joining the workforce. HB 2467 will make needed changes to Oregon's public defense infrastructure by ensuring that public defenders have reasonable caseloads and increased wages, and will also create the student loan repayment assistance program to provide grants for public defense staff and attorneys to help cover student loan repayments while they are working toward their 10 years of service to qualify for federal loan forgiveness.

On behalf of CCC, we ask that you advance HB 2467 to improve the opportunities and success of public defenders in Oregon and reduce financial barriers for individuals to join the workforce, which will in turn support all Oregonians who cannot afford to hire a private attorney, especially the most impacted Oregonians, like people of color and low-income people. Thank you for your consideration.

Sol Mora (she/her)  
Advocacy Director