

Submitter: Jeff MacNeilly  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary  
Measure: SB337

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of The Committee,

This letter is in regards to SB 337-1, specifically Section 83. I write to urge you to maintain law firms as entities permitted to contract with PDSC.

I am an attorney at Strawberry Mountain Law, one such firm that is an important part of the delivery of public defense services in Eastern Oregon. As others have pointed out, law firms like ours also play a crucial role in providing access to justice for rural Oregonians with a wide variety of civil legal needs. To that point, I would add that this law firm model specifically acts as a boon to the recruitment of talented attorneys to an area that otherwise would struggle to attract and retain them.

Speaking from my own personal experience, the ability to work as a public defender while also taking on private, civil casework was the single biggest factor that made me decide to work in such a rural area. Especially for younger attorneys, the variety of experience available here is an enormous benefit to our learning and to the trajectory of our later careers. This variety has also allowed us to forge deeper connections with our communities by working with individuals and small businesses who--other than as potential jurors--have little or no interaction with the criminal court system or with the only lawyers in their county.

Being a public defender is important to me, but there are other cities and other states where I could do that. Were it not for the additional ability to take on private work, I can say with confidence I would not have come to work for this firm or in this rural area at all. In fact, some of us came to this firm from other states because of the unique and innovative service model Oregon provides. I urge you not to do away with a model that provides not only a wonderful opportunity for learning practitioners, but also access to justice for disenfranchised Eastern Oregonians. Please allow firms like ours to continue the important work that we do.

Sincerely,

--

Jeff MacNeilly  
Attorney  
Strawberry Mountain Law, P.C.  
Elkhorn Public Defender, Inc.