

To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety
From: Tiffany Howell
Date: 4/18/2023
Re: Support for SB 5532 and POPs - Critical Investments to Make Public Defense a Viable Career Option

Co-Chairs Sollman and Evans, and Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety:

My name is Tiffany Howell. I am a second year law student at the University of Oregon. I urge your support of SB 5532 and POPs 101, 102, 114, 115, and 103 which will increase compensation for the entire public defense team (attorneys, investigators, and support staff) so that Oregon retain and recruit public defense attorneys and investigators and increase capacity with more support staff.

Public defense is a cornerstone of the justice system. I am one of many students who wish to pursue a career in advocating for low income clients through public defense. However, the current status of the Oregon public defense system, particularly regarding compensation to attorneys, is a deterrent to pursuing this vital role.

In choosing a career path after I graduate from law school, I want to feel like I am contributing positively to society and that my work aligns with my personal values. I want a manageable caseload so that I know I am doing everything I can to represent my clients. In choosing a career that I will want to stay in, compensation and benefits are definitely a deciding factor.

POP 101 puts provider compensation on par with PDSC Appellate attorneys and POP 114 increases attorney pay from \$75 to match the federal rate of \$164 per hour. Increasing public defense provider compensation will make public defense a more viable career option when I graduate. Right now, with compensation as low as it is, I have classmates who want to pursue public defense but have to choose a different field because they, like myself, have a family to support. Increasing compensation, commensurate with state employee pay for similar work, sends the strongest message of support to public defense providers that they should stick in this critical work.

POP 102 provides funding for support staffing, supervision, training, and administrative costs. By funding these critical positions in a non-profit PD office or consortium, the overall attorney workload will be reduced, and case outcomes improved. A realistic and

manageable attorney workload is an important factor in choosing my career path because a healthy work/life balance is indispensable to me as a mother of four. Directing resources to build out an open workload model also sends the signal that attorneys shouldn't fear burnout due to excessive and unethical caseloads. It also provides some assurance to those entering public defense that they will not be forced to take on more cases than they can handle, that they will not be forced to violate ethical rules. This is critical to retention and recruitment.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Howell

JD Candidate, 2024

University of Oregon School of Law