

To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety
From: Thalia Guizar
Date: April 20, 2023
Re: Support for SB 5532 and POP 102 - Investment in Public Defense
Support Staff

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

My name is Thalia Guizar. I am the first case manager brought on board at the Public Defender of Marion County. I am also a first-generation college graduate, a mother, and an advocate for the BIPOC community. I am here today to urge your support of SB 5532 and POP 102 which provides funding for support staff, supervision, training, and administrative costs. By funding these critical positions in a non-profit public defender's office, the overall attorney workload will be reduced, and case outcomes improved.

I graduated from the University of Oregon with a bachelor's degree in Ethnic Studies and Spanish in 2013. Since then, I have worked in various roles with both state agencies and nonprofits, focusing on being a voice for underrepresented communities. I chose to get into public defense in order to support the members of my community who I have witnessed get lost in our justice system for years. I wanted the opportunity to remove systemic barriers and bridge the service gaps I had been running into for so many of my past clients.

As a case manager at the public defender's office, I am an advocate for our clients. My goal is that our clients are feeling supported throughout their case and are connected with the appropriate services based on their individual needs. While this can look different for everyone, our intent is to ensure we are giving each client an equitable opportunity to move forward, taking into consideration the experiences and barriers that may have contributed to their involvement in crime and assessing their overall needs. This can mean providing a client a bus pass to get to an evaluation they otherwise would have missed, being a support person in the court room when they have no friends or family in this country, or finding them an appropriate service provider that speaks their primary language and offers weekend classes so they do not have to risk losing their job.

As a case manager you often feel as though you are taking 2 steps forward and 5 steps backward. This is often due to the lack of services available or lack of engagement on behalf of a client. But then you have the unemployed client who you were able to assist in getting connected to free services, or the client who finally got a mental health appointment in her native language, or the client who lives in a house of many who you were able to provide food boxes for so they can all eat this week. And just like that you have the willpower to keep on going.

Having an additional 4-6 case managers would make a huge difference in our office. Each case manager would have the opportunity to focus on wraparound services for their client instead of limiting themselves to a few areas of need. They would have the time to seek the services that are appropriate for the client instead of having to connect them with programs that are easy to access but not necessarily the right fit for the individual. Specifically, ensuring these new case managers are bilingual would be crucial as more than 30% of our clients are not native English speakers and deserve to work with someone they can not only count on, but also communicate with.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

Thalia Guizar
Case Manager
Public Defender of Marion County