

Submitter: Micah Shapiro

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public
Safety

Measure: SB5532

I'm a third-year law student at Lewis & Clark Law, and I'm a Certified Law Student who works at Multnomah Defenders Inc., which provides legal defense for the indigent in downtown Portland. I'm writing in support of SB 5532, and I'm also writing to express my support for expanding funding for public defense state-wide. The system of public defense is in crisis in Oregon, and as a result our state courts are violating the constitutional rights of accused persons every day.

As a law student, I have taken on an enormous amount of debt, and I currently face the nerve-racking prospect of finding a job. While I have the desire to work in public defense, I am not sure I can justify it. Many of my peers at law school who are interested in public defense have told me that they simply cannot afford that line of work. They want a family, to pay down student loans, or even just to develop a moderate sense of financial security like one day purchasing a home. These are not extravagant dreams, and those who have expressed this to me have decided to apply to prosecution positions where they can accomplish these goals. Should I deny myself these financial goals in the name of public defense? Or should I instead apply for a job in prosecution that starts at \$24,000 higher pay plus much better retirement benefits? There is not much of a choice.

Currently, we do not have enough attorneys working in public defense to represent all of Oregon's indigent needs, and this violates both the U.S. Constitution and Oregon's Constitution. There two paths toward fixing this problem: 1) legislating more budget to attract and retain public defenders, and 2) administrative overhaul to create more efficiency and supervision. Without these advancements, those many people who have been accused of crimes and denied representation will languish with infringements upon their liberty and the inability to defend themselves or move their cases forward.

Thank you for your time, for responding to this crisis, and for representing the people and our Constitutions. Our public defense system has more public support than it ever has, so please seize this opportunity while you have the chance.