



AFSCME Local 2235 Support for SB 5532
and the Policy Option Packages

April 21, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Evans and Sollman and member of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of increased funding for the Office of Public Defense Services budget SB 5532 and the Policy Option Packages that have been presented to you by Director Kampfe and OPDS staff. These investments are critical for retaining current attorneys and staff as well for recruitment of public defense providers.

We are members of the executive board of AFSCME Local 2435, representing OPDS appellate division attorneys and support staff, and administrative services division staff. We are dedicated professionals that have long been in the public defense trenches and we believe it is past time to make a significant investment in public defense.

As you are all aware, there is an urgent need to modernize and expand the agency's ability to support the work of the trial level providers specifically, and the public-defense system generally. While each of the agency's Policy Option Packages do target specific program areas or divisions, those investments should be considered with an understanding of how they support the full system from trial through appeals, supporting individuals and families in that system, and the providers and employees doing this important and constitutionally-required work.

In addition to the pending reforms under consideration in SB 337, the funding requests are necessary for supporting all of the people working in public defense. Adequate support for the system as a whole will increase confidence in outcomes from all parties involved, and provide clients with the best representation throughout the process. Investments in trial-level providers, contractors, attorneys, and staff sets up the best outcomes by having an experienced team to gather the facts of the case, and learn about the client and circumstances. When there is a full and experienced team, clients can be connected to services that help address root causes of their justice involvement. If and when that case is appealed, the Appellate Division is more successful in their efforts to uphold the rights and fairness we expect in our judicial processes.

Juvenile dependency representation is also a critical piece of Oregon's public defense services. These providers support individuals and families, connecting them to much needed wrap-around services for children and adults. Dependency representation gives many of the adults what they need to be successful individuals and parents. This kind of success reduces



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recidivism and supports Oregon's policy goal in keeping families
stable and attached and sets them up for lifelong success.

Specific to expanding the Parent Child Representation Program, both members working under PCRPs contracts and those administering the contracts speak highly of the clarity in expectations, caseloads and workloads, staffing guidelines and case managers to support clients. The contract administrators appreciate the simplicity of the contract model. As we continue our reform work, we should consider applying this contract model to trial and delinquency work as well. Expansion generally, will provide stability for those working in dependency and for the clients whose legal needs might cross jurisdictions.

Of course this work is not possible without the staff that provides for the contractual support, and payments to the providers. Our members in Administrative Services experience the other side of the frustrations that you have heard about from contractors. The need for appropriate staffing along with the years of "making do" and layers of amendments to contracts from the band-aid fixes have created an unsupportive and unsustainable situation for all OPDS staff and all of our contractors. We need staff that have the capacity to respond to providers' questions and as well as continue the work of recruiting more attorneys to contract to help alleviate the unrepresented crisis that continues to roll through the state.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

AFSCME Local 2435 Executive Board