

April 21st, 2023

Co-Chair Sollman, Co-Chair Evans, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lee Wachocki and I'm an attorney at Multnomah Defenders, Inc. (MDI). MDI is a nonprofit public defense firm in Portland and I serve as MDI's union president. MDI continues to lose attorneys and staff to jobs that offer better pay and lower caseloads, compounding the statewide attorney shortage and unrepresented persons crisis. You can help keep attorneys and staff in the public defense workforce (and add more to the workforce) by supporting an increase to the Office of Public Defense Services budget and policy option packages 101 and 102.

MDI has lost 25 attorneys since December 31, 2019. The 25th attorney resigned March 31st of this year, and resigned despite the fact that we're in the middle of OPDS's 5-month attorney retention incentive "bonus" rollout wherein my firm receives up to \$15,000 per qualifying attorney who sticks around until July. Our 25th attorney didn't stick around until July.

I have the grim honor of administering exit interviews for our departing attorneys: low pay and high caseloads are the most commonly cited reasons for leaving. MDI recently conducted a survey wherein we asked attorneys and staff handling criminal matters to rank their priorities, 1-6, for improving recruitment and retention. 2nd place went to caseload reductions. 1st place went to pay increases.

These numbers support what you may already know: we are not getting out of this crisis with band-aids like one-time bonuses. Starting pay for a deputy prosecutor in Multnomah County is roughly \$98,000 per year. \$95,000 for a starting Portland City Attorney. Starting pay for an attorney at my firm is only \$72,000. Public defense providers will continue to hemorrhage attorneys and staff until the reimbursement rate for public defense work is increased.

Please support an increase in OPDS's budget and public defense reimbursement statewide. Please support pay parity with comparable Oregon Department of Justice and OPDS Appellate Division positions. This is what it will take to stabilize our public defense workforce and respond to the damning studies of our state's current public defense system.