

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide supportive comments on SB 474 and for your attention to public defense in Oregon. My name is Lukas Farnand and I am a current student in the Willamette University College of Law Criminal Defense Clinic. I participated in this clinic to gain real-world experience representing clients and to prepare for a career in criminal law.

It has only been a few quick weeks since I started the criminal defense clinic but the experience has already been extremely valuable and I am grateful for the opportunity that has been provided to me. As a 1L at Willamette, I worked hard in all my classes, and for the most part that hard work was reflected in my grades. However, when it came to looking for a summer internship I experienced a fruitless search. I applied and interviewed for firms in both Salem and Portland, but I was unable to secure an internship and missed out on vital legal experience that many of my colleagues were able to gain. Going into my 2L year I was concerned that I would be at a significant disadvantage compared to other applicants for summer internships, a step behind, as I lacked real-world legal experience. The criminal defense clinic took a chance on me, and I am gaining experience in client representation, getting the opportunity to apply my legal writing and research skills in a meaningful way, and I have been able to go into interviews with the confidence that someone believed I had what it takes to be a lawyer. Just recently I accepted a job at Multnomah County DA's office. I greatly contribute the job offer to my acceptance into the criminal defense clinic, as I would have completely lacked any experience if it wasn't for the clinic. Working with Professor Wohlers has helped shape how I think about criminal law, and broadened my perception of what it means to participate in criminal defense. My experience in the clinic has encouraged passionate advocacy, inspired holistic and humanizing approaches towards representation, and a greater appreciation for the work that public defenders contribute to the criminal justice system. I was told during orientation, my first week of law school, that if you want to be a great lawyer you need to understand how both sides of the aisle think, and because of the clinic I truly believe that I have been put on the right track to become a great lawyer. Another thing I learned from my first week of orientation is that Oregon has an appreciable need for public defenders. Professor Wohlers is in the perfect position to inspire the next generation of public defenders, he is passionate about the work we do and his confidence in the students in the clinic is inspiring. It should be noted that his influence is not limited to creating motivated public defenders. For people who take jobs in criminal prosecution, their time in the clinic will allow them to take a holistic approach that recognizes the values and challenges for both sides of criminal law. If we are to create a more sustainable and ethical public defense system in Oregon it will require work on both ends of the justice system. Seminars and final exams help young lawyers create a realistic expectation of the amount of time and dedication that legal work will require, but the clinic is one of the few opportunities that provides students with the real-world tools necessary to be successful as a lawyer post-graduation.

I urge the committee to support continued funding for the law school public defense clinics through SB 474. By doing so, the legislature will ensure that more students can receive the same opportunity I've been given, provide essential experience and training to students while addressing the critical shortage of public defenders in Oregon, and inspire the next generation of young lawyers.

Sincerely,
Lukas Farnand