

Meagan A. Flynn
Chief Justice



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OREGON SUPREME COURT

April 12, 2023

The Honorable Janeen Sollman, Co-Chair
The Honorable Paul Evans, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Introduction to Public Defense Services Commission Budget

Dear Co-Chair Sollman and Co-Chair Evans:

Although I am not able to attend your meeting today, I am grateful to Justice Rebecca Duncan for acting on my behalf and presenting to you the budget for the Public Defense Services Commission (PDSC). Before you hear from Commission Chair Per Ramfjord, I've asked Justice Duncan to express my gratitude, and the gratitude of the entire Supreme Court, for the ongoing work of so many to meet the constitutional right to counsel that the US Supreme Court announced six decades ago in *Gideon v. Wainwright*.

I would like to start with thanking Chair Ramfjord for his lengthy service as head of the PDSC. We all know what a challenging time this has been for public defense and for the Commission, and he has earned our gratitude for his steadfast service. I'm grateful to Representative Evans and Senator Prozanski for leading the efforts of the Three-Branch Workgroup to create a strong and stable framework for Oregon's public defense system, and to all the other legislators and staff who have provided crucial guidance and support in those efforts.

I also want to specifically acknowledge and thank all of the commissioners who donate countless hours of service on the PDSC and the director and staff of the Office of Public Defense Services who have remained dedicated and unflappable during trying times. And I'm grateful to all the attorneys taking public defense cases who have continued to put their heart and soul into this very challenging work. Finally, I'm grateful to the judges and Judicial Department staff throughout this state who have made extraordinary

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Public Safety
Page 2
April 12, 2023

efforts to resolve cases and find qualified attorneys to represent the growing number of Oregonians who are eligible – but still waiting – for a court-appointed lawyer.

Members of the committee already know that the availability of public defense services has a dramatic impact on vulnerable Oregonians. As I write this letter, Oregon has 134 people held in custody without a lawyer in 24 counties, and 1,000 others out of custody. They are in a state of limbo, with charges pending and no conclusion. Victims and communities are also left waiting.

Although statutes prevent the Oregon Judicial Department from exercising administrative authority over public defense services, I as Chief Justice, along with the rest of the judges and staff of the Judicial Department, will continue to do everything that we can to ensure that we have a public defense system that provides transparency and accountability, uses accurate and meaningful data, provides appropriate compensation for those who work in the system and, most importantly, provides quality services to those in need of counsel.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Meagan A. Flynn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Meagan A. Flynn
Chief Justice

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