

SB 474: TRAINING OREGON'S NEXT GENERATION OF PUBLIC DEFENDERS

Oregon's public defense system remains in crisis, with too few public defenders to meet the legal needs of Oregonians. Many defendants, especially in misdemeanor cases, go unrepresented, undermining access to justice statewide.

In 2024, the Legislature allocated \$2.1 million in one-time funding for misdemeanor criminal defense clinics at Oregon's three law schools—Lewis & Clark, University of Oregon, and Willamette—to provide intensive, structured training and supervision of court certified law students to undertake misdemeanor cases. **By the end of the first year, the three schools expect to have trained 60 law students and provided public defense services for eligible defendants in 450-500 misdemeanor cases.**

Support Senate Bill 474

To confront the ongoing public defense crisis, Senate Bill 474 would establish a **Criminal Defense Clinical Legal Education State Program** funded through the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to provide intensive, structured training and supervision of court certified law students to undertake misdemeanor cases.

This program will provide the critical, sustained funding needed to ensure Oregon law schools can continue offering legal representation to underserved Oregonians while developing the public defense workforce essential to the state's justice system.

Oregon's three law schools are requesting \$3.6 million in funding for the program for 2025-27, distributed as follows:

- University of Oregon: \$1.35 million
- Lewis & Clark University: \$1.14 million
- Willamette University: \$1.09 million



Why It Matters

The funding provided in 2024 demonstrated the effectiveness of law school clinics in addressing Oregon's public defense crisis.

These clinics not only provide immediate relief by representing clients and taking cases off the unrepresented persons list, but also strengthen the public defense system by expanding Oregon's pipeline of well-trained graduates with experience in and a commitment to public defense.

Without sustained funding, this vital work—and the benefits it brings to Oregon's justice system—cannot continue.

Expected Impact

- Approximately **900 misdemeanor cases** handled biennially by supervised law students.
- Approximately **120 students** trained biennially, graduating with practical experience and the ability to handle misdemeanor cases.
- **Collaboration with local public defender offices**, including Metropolitan Public Defender, Lane County Public Defender Services, and Public Defender of Marion County.