



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Oregon Youth Authority  
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Senator Jackie Winters, Co-Chair  
Representative Duane Stark, Co-Chair  
Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee  
Oregon State Legislature

Dear Co-Chairs Winters and Stark and Members of the Subcommittee:

We are writing to express support for the Public Defense Services Commission and its goal of providing high quality representation to youth. PDSC is a critical partner in Oregon's public safety system and its adequate funding is a key to protecting the safety of Oregonians and enabling young people involved in the Oregon's criminal, juvenile and dependency systems to become crime free and productive members of our communities.

A foundational component of the developmental approach to juvenile justice is that youth are different than adults and, therefore, our public systems need to treat them differently. This is borne out in the science behind adolescent and young adult brain development. Applying this principle to the public defense function, it's critical that the lawyers appointed to represent Oregon's young people are highly qualified, receive specialized training in the unique role of representing youth, have manageable caseloads, and are paid adequately and commensurately with professionals in the field.

Anecdotally, we know that most of the youth that come to OYA have had public defenders representing them at trial and on appeal. Our data shows that a significant percentage of OYA youth were or currently still are involved in a dependency matter for which legal representation is required. Additionally, we know that an alarmingly disproportionate percentage of youth committed to OYA's care are youth of color.

It is well known that public defense providers take on caseloads that are far too high, compromising the quality of representation. We also know from our experience and conversations with youth in our system that this circumstance far too often results in outcomes for youth that impact their length of stay, likelihood of recidivism and numerous collateral consequences that impact their futures. Even in this difficult fiscal cycle, the Governor has acknowledged the need to put public defenders on a path closer to parity.

Thank you for your interest in ensuring the continued efficiency and viability of the public safety system by doing everything you can to ensure adequate funding for PDSC and their critical function in our system.

Sincerely,

Fariborz Pakserest  
Director

Joe O'Leary  
Deputy Director