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House Addresses Public Defense Crisis

Democrats pass Senate Bill 337 and deliver on their promise to ensure an accountable, transparent, and efficient public defense system

SALEM, Ore. - Today, the House fulfilled their commitment to addressing the state's public defender shortage. Senate Bill 337 will protect Oregonians' right to representation, reduce caseloads, and bolster the public defender workforce.

"I have seen firsthand the importance of making sure people have access to competent counsel. It is a foundational piece of our criminal justice system," **said Representative Jason Kropf (D-Bend), Chair of the House Judiciary Committee and former public defender and Deputy District Attorney.** "When individuals don't have representation, it delays the timely and appropriate application of justice. Oregonians must have their constitutional rights upheld."

Senate Bill 337 will stabilize Oregon's public defense system by:

Investing over \$90 million in the Oregon Public Defense

Commission (formerly the Public Defense Services Commission) and other resources and services supporting work to end the unrepresented crisis.

Addressing the immediate crisis:

- Requiring the presiding judge of each unique judicial district to prepare a coordinated public safety unrepresented defendant crisis plan to get people representation now.
- Creating strike response teams to strategically allocate public defenders into court systems with the most severe need from regional hubs across the state.
- Investing in workforce recruitment and retention by increasing funding for training, compensation, and contracting.

Modernizing Oregon’s public defense system through meaningful, systemic reform:

- Ensuring oversight and accountability by moving the Oregon Public Defense Commission to the executive branch.
- Increasing data collection and reporting requirements.

“SB 337 seeks to solve a problem forty years in the making,” said **Representative Paul Evans (D-Monmouth), Co-Chair of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety**. “This bill provides us with a short-term plan to address a crisis of more than 300 people incarcerated without adequate counsel for arraignment, and a structural fix for the larger problems that got us here. This is a step in the right direction towards a more sustainable approach, and to build a justice system we can believe in.”

Senate Bill 337 passed 34-16 and now heads to the Governor’s desk for consideration.

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