



Oregon

Office of Public Defense Services

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March 19, 2020

Dear Public Defense Providers,

I know you're facing enormous challenges during this unprecedented public health crisis. We have heard from many of you over the past couple of weeks and it is clear that you are deeply committed to serving in your clients' best interest. Thanks to those of you who've reached out. We're facing a rapidly spreading virus that has led to devastating impacts on Americans' lives everywhere. This community and your clients need your voice and talents more than ever, and I thank you for your dedication and determination in these trying times.

At the Office of Public Defense Services, we remain unwaveringly committed to our public defenders and clients. We are actively working with the Oregon Judicial Department, Department of Human Services, law enforcement, and other system partners across the state to discuss concerns about the need to create social distancing during legal proceedings and client-attorney conferences, preserving clients' civil rights, and protecting community health in the incarcerated population. We don't have all of the answers right now. But what we do know is this: No one individual or agency can solve these challenges alone.

Now more than ever, we need to come together for the sake of our clients and the health of the greater community. That starts by hearing from you. To support our justice system in limiting potential exposure to the coronavirus while also fulfilling our mission to our clients, we need to understand more about your greatest challenges.

Starting next Tuesday, we will host a weekly conference call for providers (see below for details). On these calls, we will share updates and information about COVID-related issues that impact the public defense community and address common questions and concerns we receive from providers.

Your voices are essential to this work and we also need to hear from you on the impact this pandemic is having in local jurisdictions throughout the state. The more we know about what's happening in your jurisdictions, the more we can try to facilitate relief. Please email your questions and feedback to Kaysea R. Dahlstrom at: Kaysea.R.Dahlstrom@opds.state.or.us.

Many of you also have questions about our business operations and your contracts.

You will continue to be paid. Many of you are understandably concerned that a reduction and postponement in cases will impact your incomes. In the current situation, we do not see the need to reduce or cut any contracts.

This is in part thanks to the recent changes we made, stepping away from the case credit model and toward the FTE model. While many of our agency employees are working remotely, we are fully resourced to pay bills in a timely manner. In addition, Governor Brown yesterday directed executive branch agencies to not cut any programs. If we start to see disruptions in the system warranting a change, you have my commitment of timely, transparent communications, as outlined in the contract.

We are evaluating whether a delay in the RFP process is necessary. You may be hearing from our office to learn about the challenges you may be facing in meeting the current deadlines. We will need to consider and balance several factors -- including the \$20 million appropriation we are requesting from the emergency board in the Legislature. Again, we will be sure to stay in open communications with all of you so you have all the information you need to be successful.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge how dramatically all of our lives have changed in a matter of days. Many of you are juggling childcare and homeschooling, with advocating for clients and navigating concerns about your and your families' health. While so much is uncertain, knowing that we have all of you advocating for the best interest of your clients gives me great confidence that we will get through this together. Thank you for your service.

Sincerely,

Lane Borg
Executive Director, OPDS

Please join us for a conference call with OPDS!

Who: All Oregon public defenders are welcome.

When: Every Tuesday, starting March 24th, 2020 at 10:30 a.m. PST

Where: Please call our toll-free conference line – **(866) 390-1828** – and enter the Participant Code – **805008** – when prompted.

Questions, feedback, and RSVPs: Kaysea R. Dahlstrom at

Kaysea.R.Dahlstrom@opds.state.or.us