March 30, 2017

To: Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee
   Senator Jackie Winters
   Representative Duane Stark

Re: HB 5033 Public Defense Services Commission - Comments

The League believes that the State of Oregon should provide access to its courts that meets the diverse needs of all people who use state courts. The League also believes in funding of mandated programs or procedures for the state courts. The appointment of Public Defense Attorneys for indigent persons in juvenile delinquency or criminal cases is a required court procedure and should be adequately funded.

Public Defense Attorneys are critical players in the state court system and in the search for justice. The alleged offender is interviewed and the facts of the crime reviewed to determine if the charges are supported. The Defender can bring new information and investigation of circumstances to a trial or negotiations to resolve a case. In the sentencing phase, defenders can suggest the best use of community resources or state agencies to deal with offender behavioral or substance abuse issues. In other words, public defenders serve an essential role in the justice system and should be paid accordingly.

The League members support the request for compensation equivalent to deputy district attorneys and the recognition that the defender role has equal value to the court system. Lady Justice has 2 scales in balance. Let’s keep the justice in balance in the system.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.

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