

MARTHA L. WALTERS
Chief Justice



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April 5, 2022

Honorable Kate Brown
Governor of Oregon
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Honorable Peter Courtney
Oregon Senate President
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Honorable Dan Rayfield
Oregon House Speaker
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Governor Brown, President Courtney, and Speaker Rayfield:

I am writing to invite you to join a Three Branch Summit to develop a plan to improve Oregon's public defense and public safety systems.

Before I discuss that Three Branch Summit, I want to acknowledge that we have an immediate crisis that cannot wait for the deliberative process that I anticipate will be needed to develop long-lasting solutions. The current crisis is having a real impact on defendants who have a constitutional right to counsel, on courts' ability to resolve cases, on the safety of our communities. Beginning on April 11, I will be hosting a series of meetings to address the crisis and my initial focus will be on Multnomah County, where the problems are most significant. As you know, the legislature appropriated \$12.8 million to increase hiring of public defenders, but providers have found it more difficult than anticipated to do that hiring and are also facing the unanticipated loss of experienced counsel. In addition to a lack of public defense attorneys, I understand that the district attorney's office is experiencing turnover and that the sheriff's office lacks staff to (1) transport people in custody to scheduled court appearances, and (2) facilitate attorney-client visits that are critical to case resolution.

If you have ideas about how to tackle the immediate crisis, I would appreciate your thoughts, and I hope that the meetings I will be hosting over the next weeks and months also will generate proposals that may inform longer-term efforts. But I know that however successful we may be in the immediate term, systemic problems will remain and must be considered in a longer-term, broad-based deliberative process. I am therefore asking that you join me in planning a Three Branch Summit on Public Defense and Public Safety. I envision the Summit as a way for us to discuss and agree on longer-term changes to our public defense and public safety systems to make them stronger and more effective. I would like to discuss this idea with you at your earliest convenience. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Martha L. Walters".

Martha L. Walters

cc: Nancy Cozine
Phillip Lemman
Erin Pettigrew
Per Ramfjord
Steve Singer