

Public Defender Budget

Good Morning

I am Maureen Earls:

I want to commend this Board for your past support in increasing Public Defender staffing and beginning to reduce excessive workloads. That leadership is already making a measurable difference.

This budget moment is not just a crisis—it is an opportunity to fix costly inefficiencies in our jail system that are still driving unnecessary incarceration.

The data is clear: When Public Defenders have manageable workloads and provide early representation, people spend fewer days in jail before arraignment. That is already reducing our average daily population. With the expansion funding before you, those reductions are expected to grow.

Evidence—and common sense—tell us that reducing excessive workloads after arraignment will reduce court delays, a major driver of prolonged jail stays. Even modest investments can save millions by reducing the time people spend waiting in jail.

The economics are clear: Every unnecessary day in jail costs roughly \$400 per person. Reducing those days lowers our average daily population—and reduces the need to build and operate 128 additional jail beds at a long-term cost of up to \$147 million.

The moral imperative is clear: People have a right to timely access to justice. Many are sitting in jail not because they pose a risk, but because the system is delayed. These are people who lose jobs, housing, and stability—and who will return to our community.

**We can invest in efficiency, fairness, and fiscal responsibility—
or spend millions expanding a system we know is not working as well as it should.**

I urge you to continue investing in Public Defender capacity to reduce delays, reduce jail population, and build a more just system.