



# Oregon

## Office of Public Defense Services

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June 8, 2020

Dear Oregon Public Defense Community,

The Office of Public Defense Services stands in solidarity with the Black community rising up across our country. We see and hear their anguish and anger. We add our voice to theirs in demanding racial justice, healing and an end to police brutality.

We know that the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and so many others are predictable consequences of structural and institutionalized racism that go back to the very roots of our nation. Racism permeates every aspect of our country and the racial oppression that Black individuals experience in the justice system continue to endanger their lives.

While our country's magnifying glass is currently focused on police brutality, our work stands directly adjacent to this dysfunction. To truly meet our mission of equitably advocating for our Black clients, we have an important responsibility to fight against racism in ourselves and in the system.

We must come together to understand how we have perpetuated these oppressions through our implicit biases and learn about our role in dismantling white supremacy in the justice system.

We need to understand that by the time we meet our Black clients, they were likely victims of over-policing, racial profiling and/or police brutality. Their arrest history or police record may be shaded with racist bias. We must keep this in mind in order to avoid perpetuating the racial oppression that exists in our justice system.

Addressing our personal biases is not enough. The problem of racial injustice is systemic, and it requires systemic solutions. We need to measure racial disparity data and call for systems change. For example, measuring racial disparities in drug charges led the Oregon Legislature to defelonize small-scale controlled substance possession. However, much more work remains to be done.

At OPDS, we are also taking this moment to look inside our own agency and the ways we can support a more equitable public defense system. In the 2020 legislative session, we asked the Legislature to support our work to improve equity, inclusion and culturally specific services in our contracting process. House Bill 4004 didn't pass but we remain committed. You will see us advocate for this policy in the 2021 session.

Finally, our leadership is working with the Oregon Public Defense Commission to identify further steps we can take toward becoming an equitable and safe agency for all our employees, partners and stakeholders. I look forward to updating you with more concrete information soon.

As always, I appreciate your hard work and dedication to our clients. Achieving racial justice will require all of us to learn, empathize and advocate tirelessly. OPDS is committed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lane Borg', is positioned above the typed name.

Lane Borg  
Executive Director  
Office of Public Defense Services