

Good morning Senator Rotundo and Representative Gattine,

My name is Colleen Cosgriff, I am a 3L at Maine Law. I'm currently working in the Clinic, and I am also a member of the student organization Students for the Sixth Amendment. This organization was founded by students in 2022 to advocate for and educate on the topic of the Sixth Amendment right to counsel. I'm here today in support of LD 2212.

My time at Maine Law and the Clinic has affirmed my desire to practice indigent criminal defense. I have found the defense bar here to be full of incredible people, and my hope is to remain in Maine to practice. I am not alone in this pursuit. In the three years I have been at Maine Law, I have witnessed an increase in student interest and excitement in criminal defense, in particular the Public Defender's offices. We want to be a part of a vibrant and growing legal community that is working to address the state's representation crisis. During our time at Maine Law we have seen how the unrepresented list has gone down as the state invests in public defense, and are proud and inspired by the work of our community.

However, there is a concern that these opportunities will not exist in Maine, especially for those early in their career, and we may need to leave the state or find another area of practice to sustain ourselves. There is concern about budgets being cut and jobs being slashed. Many students at Maine Law have children, debt, and other responsibilities that make entering a potentially unstable career path impossible.

Jobs in public defender offices offer opportunities for training and growth from skilled attorneys and staff with the capacity to mentor new attorneys. Many students at Maine Law have already experienced the privilege of learning within Public Defender offices through externships during law school. Students want to work at the Public Defender's offices post grad. That being said, to date, some have had to pursue these opportunities in other states because the open positions and stability they needed simply did not exist here in Maine. Or they instead seek out other areas of practice that are more stable.

I do not want to leave Maine. I do not want to see my peers leave Maine and take their talents with them. Students at Maine Law seek out Maine Law because they want to be a part of *Maine's* legal community, and want to do work that will benefit *this* community. Part of community building is ensuring all people have access to a defense, and my peers and I want to be a part of upholding the Sixth Amendment in the state we care so deeply about. This bill supports both of those goals: ensuring that this area of practice is sustainable for the next generation of lawyers at the state's only (and best!) law school, and upholding the Sixth Amendment.