

# RAPHAEL HOUSE

of portland

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SUBMITTED BY: Megan Kovacs

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Chair Gilliam, Chair Tomei, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Megan Kovacs, and I am the Education Coordinator at Raphael House of Portland. Raphael House of Portland is a multi-faceted domestic violence agency dedicated to fighting the causes and effects of intimate partner violence in a variety of ways. The mission of Raphael House is to provide a foundation of hope for a life free from family violence, and we have been working in this community—offering domestic violence survivors the tools they need to build violence-free lives—for more than 30 years. Raphael House serves a diverse community of women and children escaping domestic violence, and in my role as Education Coordinator we work to eliminate the causes of family and intimate partner violence through community education and outreach. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of House Bill 4077.

Dating violence is immensely widespread amongst local teens: a study by Sisters in Action for Power showed that 75% of teenage girls from North and Northeast Portland have friends currently in or with a history of abusive relationships (study cited in *Bullying and Dating Violence: Effective Intervention and Prevention in Multnomah County*). Dating violence is also immensely damaging to the teenage psyche, sense of self and well being.

“Being abused in a relationship can shatter a teenager’s belief that she is a worthy, decent, and independent person who can cope with life in a mature, self-assertive fashion. For the teen victim, the world becomes a frightening, confusing place where understanding how things are supposed to work is called into question. The victim’s sense of her ability to protect herself and function autonomously is undermined.”

- Carole Sousa, *Teen Dating Violence: The Hidden Epidemic 2005*

Studies show that abusive relationships have a variety of impacts on a student’s school performance and mental health. Students who are sexually assaulted often experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which affects ability to concentrate; some studies show a direct correlation between the onset of dating violence and difficulties making academic progress. In resolution 388 the U.S. Senate states that “violent relationships in adolescence can have serious ramifications for victims, putting them at higher risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behavior, suicide, and adult revictimization.”

Over the past five years, Raphael House's Education Program has worked to create a partnership with local schools to offer students the highest quality curriculum on dating violence and healthy relationships. We offer free workshops to students as well as training and curriculum assistance to staff, administrators and parents. In 2010, our Education Program provided vital information on healthy relationships to 4,187 local middle and high school students. We believe in the importance of creating a safer community for survivors by raising awareness about dating violence, often by facilitating discussion and laying a foundation for knowing what one deserves in a relationship. That is, discussing things like respect, personal responsibility, trust, equality and healthy communication. One way we can make an important impact and influence the effects of dating violence on our community is by passing HB 4077, making addressing dating violence a priority in Oregon and in schools.

As Education Coordinator, I have worked with countless teenage survivors who have indicated that education in their school, having a supportive community that recognized and responded to abuse in relationships would have made an immense impact on their ability to find safety. In a recent survey of women staying at Raphael House, approximately 85% indicated that healthy relationships education and a community willing to address dating violence in their school would have most likely helped them to recognize what abuse looks like in a relationship and access safety sooner.

It is imperative that Oregon begin the process of identifying dating violence as an epidemic affecting youth in our community. We can begin to do this by passing House Bill 4077 in order to unify schools in responding to dating violence, study its prevalence among Oregon teens and create a safer community for Oregon youth by raising awareness in our communities, thereby creating safer communities for survivors and beginning the work of ending violence. We can begin creating a safer community and laying a foundation of support, awareness and services for Oregon youth by passing House Bill 4077. With that, I offer my support in favor of this bill.

Thank you for your time.