

OREGON LAW CENTER

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Testimony in Support of HB 2350
Before the House Human Services and Housing Committee
February 13, 2013
Submitted by: Sybil Hebb

Chairs Tomei, Vice-Chairs Gomberg and Olson, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, I submit this testimony in support of the HB 2350, which would allow us to gain valuable insight into how teen dating violence impacts the lives of our youth, for the purposes of better informing our outreach, education, and prevention efforts. HB 2350 is an important next step to follow up on this committee's important action in passage of HB 4077 in 2012, which provided a road map for schools to put policies and procedures in place to respond to incidents of teen dating and sexual violence between students. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on HB 2350, and for your leadership on these issues.

As you know, the Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Over the years, the Law Center has seen an increasing number of clients whose civil legal issues are related to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. These issues greatly contribute to the vulnerability of our clients, and further trap them in poverty and crisis. We are committed to improving the coordinated community and system response necessary to help stop this violence. In accomplishing this goal, focusing efforts on teen populations is of the utmost importance. Prevention of violence between teenagers in dating relationships helps to prevent future violence and victimization, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, and other crises that impact individuals, families, and communities.

Oregon has seen reduced crime rates as a whole, yet domestic violence rates remain steady, and domestic violence fatalities appear to be on the rise. After a shocking series of tragic murders in late 2009, in which 18 men, women, and children lost their lives to domestic violence in less than one month, the trend has continued. In 2010, our state suffered the loss of thirty-eight Oregonians due to Intimate Partner-related violent deaths. During that year, nearly one in three of all homicides in Oregon was related to Intimate Partner violence.¹ From 2003 through 2010, Oregon lost 206 members of our communities due to Intimate Partner Violence.² In 2011, there were 33 deaths. In 2012, there were over 40 deaths. This violence is not limited to urban counties, or to rural areas, but is statewide: twenty-seven of Oregon's 36 counties suffered a loss of life due to Intimate Partner Violence between 2003 and 2010. The victims were men, women, and children.³

¹ Shen, X, Millet L, 2012. Violent Deaths in Oregon: 2010. Oregon Health Authority, Portland, Oregon.

² Shen X, Millet L. 2010. Homicides Related to Intimate Partner Violence in Oregon: A Seven Year Review. Oregon Department of Human Services, Portland, Oregon.

³ Greenawald, Erin, JD. Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team 2012 Report to the Legislature. Oregon Department of Justice

The fatalities we have seen are the worst possible outcome of many, many more cases throughout our communities in which victims sustain injuries, live in fear, and suffer immensely. More than 85,000 Oregon women report having been physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate or recently intimate partner in the last 5 years. Oregon children witness 33 % of intimate partner physical assaults. At last tally, domestic and sexual violence make up nearly 1/3 of Oregon's violent crime.

Aside from the human toll this public health epidemic takes on victims and communities, there are significant financial impacts to our state. The health care costs of domestic violence in Oregon are more than \$35 million per year. Domestic violence and sexual assault make up at least 1/3 of Oregon violent crime. And nearly 1/3 of child welfare cases in Oregon involve domestic violence.

Teens and young people are especially vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Approximately one in three adolescent girls in the United States is a victim of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner, according to the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2008). And young people aged 12-19 experience the highest rates of rape and sexual assault in our country.⁴ More than half of Oregon rape victims are under 17 years old. This is a problem that affects boys as well as girls: One in ten high school students has been purposefully hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend.

There is a strong correlation between teen dating violence and future health and social problems. Teens who are victims are more likely than their non-abused peers to smoke, use drugs, engage in risky sexual behaviors, and attempt or consider suicide.⁵ Teens who are victims of physical dating violence are more likely to do poorly in school, or to skip school entirely because they feel unsafe. The severity of adult intimate partner violence is often greater in cases where the pattern of abuse was established in adolescence.

Teens have less access to resources and protection than they deserve. Many teens do not have parents who are informed or protective. Teens have trouble accessing the services they need without the support of their parents. Teens cannot seek shelter on their own, and may not seek a restraining order for their protection except in certain circumstances. Without resources or options, teens suffering from domestic or sexual violence are more likely to suffer repeat abuse, and more likely to perpetuate that cycle into adulthood.

To address this epidemic affecting our communities, it is essential that we find new and creative ways of reaching out specifically to young people. Early intervention for both victims and perpetrators will help break the cycle of violence and prevent future injury and suffering. The data provided by the enhanced Healthy Teens Survey and the longitudinal study will help us learn more and do a better job of targeting future prevention and safety outreach to this vulnerable population that represents the future of our state.

⁴ Truman, Jennifer and Rand, Michael. 2010. *Criminal Victimization, 2009*. U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available at <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv09.pdf>.

⁵ Silverman, J, Raj A, et al. 2001. Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality. *JAMA*. 286:572-579. Available at <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/286/5/572>.

In closing, HB 2350 would provide a road map for the prevention of domestic and sexual violence in our schools and against our young people. This is the right road map for our state's future health.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration, and please feel free to contact me should you have questions.

Sincerely,

Sybil Hebb
Oregon Law Center