



Children First for Oregon

Speaking Up for Kids Since 1991

TO: Joint Public Safety Subcommittee
FROM: Robin Christian, Children First for Oregon
DATE: February 27, 2013
RE: Oregon Domestic & Sexual Violence Services Fund

Co-Chairs Williamson & Winters, Members of the Committee:

I am Robin Christian, Executive Director of Children First for Oregon. Children First's mission is to make long-term systemic change by advocating for programs and policies that keep children healthy and safe, and strengthen families.

Children are deeply affected by the behavior modeled around them. Studies show that when children are exposed to violence, they are at greater risk for substance abuse, juvenile pregnancy, and criminal behavior than those raised in homes without violence. Even when children are not directly injured by violence, exposure to violence in the home can contribute to behavioral, social, or emotional problems.

Domestic violence is a referral reason for one third of Oregon's founded child abuse cases. The presence of domestic violence in a home will immediately trigger a child welfare intervention. Domestic violence services can keep children from entering foster care unnecessarily and are more cost-effective than placing a child in out-of-home care in both the short and long-term. One-third of children who have been in foster care have poverty-level incomes and more than one in four were incarcerated within the first two years after leaving the system. We must work to ensure that victims of domestic violence have access to services that allow them to keep their children safely with them, preventing foster care placements.

The ODSVS fund provides emergency shelter, expert safety planning, counseling, and other support services to victims fleeing domestic and sexual violence in every county across the state.

Access to victim safety services reduces the incidence of re-assault by 70%. But we are failing to meet the need. In 2011, more than 20,000 adult requests for emergency shelter could not be met. Nearly half the requests for shelter come from victims who have at least one minor child in their care at the time. A \$4 million increase dollars in ODSVS funds is necessary to stabilize access to critical services for victims and their children in communities across Oregon.

Thank you.