



# Oregon Alliance to End Violence Against Women

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## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 5018 Submitted to the Ways & Means Public Safety Subcommittee February 27, 2013

*In shelter one day, a young boy tugged on my pant leg and said, "I feel safe here."  
-- Survivor in Columbia County*

Chairs Winters and Williamson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for paying considerable time and attention to the Department of Justice budget (HB 5018), which provides funding that is vital to programs that help crime victims and survivors find safety and rebuild their lives. We are particularly concerned about the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund (ODSVS), which is the only source of general funding available to the approximately 50 domestic and sexual violence services programs that are lifelines to survivors of domestic and sexual violence, stalking, and human trafficking in every county across this great state.

We are advocating for a \$4 million increase to ODSVS. We hope that by reading this letter, you'll see why this funding is more important to individuals, families, and communities throughout Oregon than ever before.

Oregon's network of domestic and sexual violence services save lives—literally. Our services provide victims the tools necessary to become survivors—safe shelter, safety planning, counseling, medical accompaniment, and legal advocacy. Research shows that these services work. A report from the Johns Hopkins University revealed that accessing domestic violence services reduced re-assault by up to 70%.

These lifesaving services are vital to the well-being of every Oregon community. Yet they are severely underfunded—total state and federal funding is less than half what programs need to provide even the basic emergency services. We know you've received testimony that illustrates how challenging the current situation is statewide. This testimony provides a few examples of what's currently happening in some communities throughout Oregon—and what we could do if ODSVS were increased by \$4 million.

### **Bradley Angle, serving Multnomah County**

Our state and county contracts cover only 50% of the cost of running our emergency shelter. Like many nonprofits, we have made adjustments to our expenses. In the past three years, we have reduced our staff from 29 to 22 FTEs (including reductions in both administrative and direct care positions). The Board of Bradley Angle recognizes that our current situation is not sustainable in the long run. Additional funding from ODSVS will help shore up emergency shelter services so we can ensure service capacity now and in the future. We have already lost one domestic violence emergency shelter in Multnomah County due to funding issues. We can't afford to lose more emergency beds for survivors.

### **Canyon Crisis Center, serving Rural Linn and Marion Counties of the Santiam River Basin**

If our ODSVS funding were doubled, we would hire an Outreach Coordinator, we would most likely raise our salaries if we could, and we would provide additional support services for our homeless survivors to help them access other services and needs. Being able to provide more comprehensive outreach programs and services is invaluable because so many of the homeless survivors go to other



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dangerous living situations. An Outreach Coordinator could provide the needed services and recruit and train volunteer advocates so we would be able to provide more information, referrals, and services. So many survivors have lost custody of their children because of the unsafe and unhealthy living conditions plus the on-going mental health services that they and their children need. This is where we would focus our resources.

### **Columbia County Women's Resource Center (CCWRC), serving Columbia County**

Additional funding will allow CCWRC to continue work in partnership and respond to increasing demand for services. Our DHS Co-located advocate and one-stop center have resulted in more survivors accessing our services, breaking the cycle of violence and beginning their healing journeys. With additional funding, we will be able to expand safety planning and emergency services, decreasing re-assault. CCWRC is straining to provide compassionate services to survivors. Additional funding will allow us to meet the rising demand for services and continue work to prevent this violence.

### **Haven From Domestic Violence, serving Gilliam, Sherman, Wasco, and Wheeler Counties**

HAVEN has experienced an increase in demand for our services for victims of domestic/dating violence and sexual assault. While an out-stationed advocate at DHS has increased the response to survivors that would not normally find transportation to HAVEN's drop-in center, it has left the office short staffed and unable to respond to the increased need for services in areas of: emergency crisis intervention and transportation (the gorge does not have any public transportation), information and referrals, shelter, legal advocacy, and community response and training. HAVEN is also experiencing an increase in needed services to the frontier tri-counties (Gilliam, Sherman, and Wheeler Counties) as we have strengthened relationships with community partners and Warm Springs Tribe. One of HAVEN's greatest needs is the transition from leaving a violent relationship (homeless) to sustainable housing, as there is no shelter in the four county areas HAVEN serves.

If our ODSVS funding were to increase, we could:

- Improve our crisis-line response and crisis intervention services.
- Hire a .75fte advocate for responding to domestic/dating violence. This advocate would also help survivors needing emergency shelter and housing.
- Hire a .75fte bi-lingual advocate for responding to the increased need for services for Hispanics/Latinos throughout the 4 counties HAVEN serves.
- Hire a .75fte advocate to respond to teens and sexual assault survivors.

### **Illinois Valley Safe House Alliance, serving Josephine County**

We saw a 29% increase in requests for services in 2012, along with the 80% reduction in our budget (due to loss of federal funding through the VAWA Rural program). We've reduced staff to two part-time positions, 0.8 FTE advocate/administrative assistant and 0.8 FTE executive director. We've reduced our advocacy center hours to three days a week and reduced every possible expense item in our budget.

We find survivors "camping out" outside our advocacy center. They can't call 911. There's one road in and out of town (it's very dark at night) and their abuser knows this – no help for them and they're easy to find. Women are staying with their abusers rather than take a chance on hitchhiking those 30 or 60 miles into Grants Pass. They are staying with friends that are sometimes only marginally better than



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their abusers, sometimes worse. Survivors are getting angry with us, "Why don't you have any help for me?" Please increase safety.

### Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Services, serving Marion County

There is an increasingly huge demand for our services. According to the Equity Study, our county should have 30.3 advocates for crisis service provision only. We have 11.7 FTE and we provide crisis intervention, shelter, emergency transportation, walk-in services (assistance with protection orders and safety planning), support groups (in English and Spanish in the urban and rural areas of our county), transitional housing, outreach services, community trainings, support and trainings in the schools, and much more.

If our ODSVS funding were doubled, we would be able to accomplish the following:

- Hire two additional full time advocates. The number of contacts to our program has nearly doubled in the last three years and we have struggled to be able to serve all of them. At least one of those advocates would be bilingual/bicultural in order to better serve the Hispanic/Latino community in our county. This would also allow us to provide more services in the most rural areas of our county. OR
- Hire an additional advocate and an Assistant Volunteer Coordinator. The Assistant Volunteer Coordinator would increase the number of volunteers we could train and supervise for hotline, shelter, support groups and other activities. Our priority would be to hire someone who is bilingual in Spanish, allowing us to increase the number of volunteer advocates for our bilingual lines. OR
- Hire an additional advocate and a Youth Services Advocate. We have seen such a huge increase in the number of schools that desire training and support for students that we are not able to provide enough services for the children in shelter. We would hire a person to offer play, art and sand therapy for the children and provide adults support and information on parenting skills.

### Saving Grace, serving Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson Counties

Over the past five years, we have had a full-time Bilingual Advocate co-located at the Deschutes County Circuit Court to help victims apply for restraining orders and stalking orders, but we will no longer have funding to sustain this position, effective June 30, 2013. This position saves time for Court staff who do not have the ability to thoroughly explain protection order provisions; provides immediate, on-site domestic violence program services for victims of abuse (including safety planning, referrals to crisis counseling, and shelter); provides a Bilingual Advocate for Spanish speakers who have additional barriers to accessing the Court; and ensures protection order petitions are thoroughly completed so judges can efficiently address the safety needs of the protection order. Additional ODSVS funding would enable Saving Grace to allocate funds to save this position.

Additionally, we saw a 62% increase in demand for La Pine services this last year. An advocate stationed at the DHS office in Bend said this of a client:

*The caseworkers were unable to help her, and asked if I would be willing to call her. She had a safe phone number, but was stuck in a home with her abuser and couldn't speak freely. Through some yes/no questions I was able to determine she did have internet access and emailing would be the easiest way to communicate. She sent me a very detailed email about her situation. La Pine is very*



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*geographically isolated and she lived eight miles from the center of town. There isn't bus service near her home, and she didn't own a car. She had no job, very little money, and was struggling with addiction. She ended one of her emails stating, "I am doing all I can to protect myself right now. I am losing hope to get out of here." Helping this client proved to be extremely challenging. There were so many obstacles that were unique to La Pine. It would be so beneficial to have additional resources that could be allocated to this specific area.*

### **Womenspace, serving Lane County**

Due to budget restrictions, Womenspace recently had to close their walk-in services, which served 800 people last year. If ODSVS were doubled, there is a good chance we could have some walk-in availability again, with some limited hours. That could get us headed in the right direction with volunteers and additional funding sources that, hopefully within a couple years, we would be able to have a self-sustaining service.

One of the big issues right now is that our funding has been so drastically reduced that we do not have a single paid advocate in the urban area that can even train volunteers and interns. ODSVS could help us to stabilize that and then we could use those resources to help train volunteers and interns so that it could become a more cost-efficient and self-sustaining program.

### **Women's Safety & Resource Center, serving Coos County and portions of Douglas County**

Our funding has decreased greatly over the last five years. We have drastically reduced our shelter staff; shelter maintenance costs have been redirected or deferred; staff have reduced their income and/or hours; basic office supplies and printing have been slashed; and administrative functions are neglected due to lack of staff. In addition, direct services to clients funding sources have been decreased. Even in our limited resource environment, we still offer a 24/7 crisis response team. Additional funding could help us get closer to meeting our previous service levels.

There is hope: domestic and sexual violence programs change lives and communities for the better. Here's just one, of many, examples:

*My family and I were out to dinner recently at a local restaurant and a woman in her late 40's approached our table. She said that she was in the area visiting friends and recognized us and had to come over and say that she and her daughter were alive today because of the help and counseling she received when she left a very violent and dangerous relationship. She said, "My daughter was 6; she is now a beautiful and healthy 16 year old honor student." Sherry related about how those days were so awful and she did not think she could make it, but with the support we gave her, she did make it and now she is a strong survivor. She owns her own home and has a great job. Sherry said, "I thank God that there was someone there for me when we needed it most!" Everyone in the restaurant was in tears and cheering her! (Advocate & survivor in Linn County)*

Thank you again for your commitment to building safe, healthy communities throughout Oregon. We hope you will increase ODSVS by \$4 million. We will gladly provide more information or answer questions you may have.