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Chair Barker, Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Officer Carrie Hull and I'm a detective with the Ashland Police Department. I'm here to testify in support of HB 2779. A large portion of my caseload consists of adult and child sexual assault investigations and I am also a law enforcement instructor with the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force's Sexual Assault Training Institute. I have spent the past two years working with victims, victim advocates, sexual assault investigators and other community partners to develop a program that will increase sexual assault reporting with the ultimate goal to increase prosecution of sexual offenders.

An important part of this program's development included in depth interviews with victims of sexual assault. During those interviews we identified many barriers a victim faces when deciding to report their assault to law enforcement. The majority of the sexual assault victims I interacted with were assaulted by a friend or acquaintance they had no prior sexual relationship with, or someone who they had met just prior to the assault. In almost every case the victim expressed concern for their immediate safety because their attacker was not a stranger and, instead, was someone they would likely see or come in contact with during normal daily activities. A significant portion of the victims I speak with are college students. It is not uncommon for their attacker to attend the same classes or be housed in the same dormitory.

Many victims of sexual assault are not ready to proceed with the criminal justice process in the immediate days, weeks or sometimes years after an assault. We work with these victims to preserve available evidence, even if initially the choice is made not to proceed with criminal charges. This increases our ability to ultimately successfully prosecute these offenders. A key component of a victim's choice to proceed with charges can be their perception of personal safety.

Many times I have had to sit with a victim and explain that they do not qualify for a protection order because they did not have a relationship with their offender. I cannot express correctly the confusion, anger and disbelief that many victims go through when hearing this. My experience has been that victims of sexual assault often want time to process what has happened to them but, understandably, also want to feel a measure of personal safety during that time. Right now I can offer them no access to a protection order unless they proceed with criminal charges at which time, if an arrest is made, the suspect is issued a no contact clause if released from jail prior to trial.

However, proceeding with a criminal case before a victim is ready can result in many problems that may have been avoided by working with the victim at their pace. This could include unnecessary trauma to that victim and we have even seen victims who will change their testimony in order to disengage from the criminal justice process. As you can imagine this is extremely problematic because it allows perpetrators, who we know are often serial offenders, to go free into our communities and perpetuates the myth that the majority of sexual assaults are false reports.

It is to everyone's benefit that sexual assault investigations are thorough, accurate and evidence-based. For this to happen you must have a victim's cooperation. A sexual assault protective order created by HB 2779 can be a positive first step in a process that allows law enforcement to provide victims of sexual assault options for their safety. By correctly addressing a victim's concerns during an investigation we have found our rate of reporting increases, allowing a greater chance at successfully identifying and prosecuting sexual offenders.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB2779. I would be happy to answer any of your questions.