

TESTIMONY on SB 503
Submitted to the Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee
By Shannon Wight, Deputy Director, Partnership for Safety and Justice
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Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Olsen, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Shannon Wight and I am the Deputy Director at Partnership for Safety and Justice. Partnership of Safety and Justice is a statewide, non-profit organization that has worked in Oregon for 15 years. We are focused on creating a public safety and criminal justice system that works for everyone. We believe that effective public safety requires being smart about crime by putting accountability first, providing crime survivors with the services they need, and supporting proven strategies to prevent future violence.

It is because of these beliefs that we support SB 503, which would enable more survivors of domestic and sexual violence to get safe and begin to rebuild their lives.

Created in 1996, the Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors (TA-DVS) program provides emergency assistance of up to \$1,200 to low-income domestic violence survivors to pay for critical safety measures for the survivors and their children. Survivors can use this limited funding to change the locks on their doors; pay for a motel as they transition out of an unsafe home; access emergency transportation; or access other emergency measures to get safe with their children.

Currently, sexual assault survivors are not eligible for this vital assistance. SB 503 would fix this gap in who is able to access this emergency support.

Data consistently shows that most survivors of sexual assault are harmed by someone they know. Survivors want to get safe, but often don't want to report the crime to law enforcement or engage with the criminal justice system—in fact, in 2013, only 35% of sexual assaults in the United States were reported to the police. Survivors may not report the sexual assault because they think the potential punishment is too severe; are uncomfortable with reporting procedures; and, particularly for survivors of color, may mistrust law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Sexual assault survivors who don't engage in the criminal justice system are ineligible for certain types of assistance, like victim compensation. Yet these survivors deserve safety just as much as survivors who report the sexual assault to law enforcement.

SB 503 would also enable more domestic violence survivors to succeed as they embark on the very delicate and dangerous steps to escaping an abusive home. When TA-DVS was created, an emergency payment of up to \$1,200 could cover the first month's rent. Almost 20 years later, this is no longer the case. Increasing TA-DVS to \$2,000 would enable more survivors to place a deposit on a new apartment; cover first month's rent; stay in a safe motel while waiting for a bed to open up in a domestic violence shelter; or other emergency safety measures that can save the

survivor—and her children’s—lives. Like the majority of sexual assault survivors, about half of domestic violence survivors also do not report the crime or engage with the criminal justice system. When domestic violence shelter beds are full, TA-DVS may be the only emergency option a survivor has to remove herself and her children from the danger at home.

Thank you for your consideration. We hope that you will join us in supporting SB 503.