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**Testimony in Support of SB 503
Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee
February 19th, 2015**

Chair Gelser, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon in support of Senate Bill 503, which would close two gaps in an important emergency assistance program for victims of domestic and sexual violence.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income vulnerable populations, and for many years, we have served an increasing number of clients whose civil legal issues are related to domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. Domestic and sexual violence seriously endanger the lives, safety, health, financial independence, and dignity of all victims. They are serious public health and safety issues in our state. Victims and their children suffer great psychological, emotional, and physical trauma, which have long term impact on their lives. 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 prevent this violence, and to help victims in crisis move towards the safety and stability they need for recovery.

Background: The Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors (TA-DVS) program has been a critical resource for some of the most vulnerable victims in our state. The program was created in the Department of Human Services in 1996, to provide emergency safety assistance to low-income victims with minor children whose safety is at risk due to domestic violence. Most often this is when the domestic violence survivor and the children are fleeing domestic violence or, without assistance, would have no choice but to return to an abusive situation. The program saves lives by making it possible for victims with children to escape immediate danger.

How it works: The program can help with up to \$1,200.00 for critical safety-related needs. Victims work with a caseworker to create a safety plan, and payments are made to third party vendors, for safety-related emergency services necessary as part of the safety plan.

- Housing related payments when there has been a domestic violence situation and the victim and children need help to finding a safe place to stay. (motel room, or help with a deposit or rent and utilities if necessary to achieve safety)
- Relocation costs to help a victim and children get to a safe place. (Bus tickets, or gas money, for example)
- Replacement of necessary personal or household items left behind when the victim and children have fled if items are not available from another source. (clothing, hygiene items, essential furniture items)
- Purchase of items that help address safety. (including new locks, motion detectors, P.O. Boxes)

The TA-DVS program is a critical resource for victims, but has 2 gaps, which SB 503 would fill:

- **Under current law, some survivors of sexual assault are not technically eligible for this life-saving assistance.** The program is currently limited to victims of domestic violence, which requires a family or household relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. This definition excludes some victims of sexual assault (for example, if the perpetrator was a co-worker, neighbor, or acquaintance), even though these victims suffer similar safety risks and have similar emergency needs for themselves and their children. Emergency assistance otherwise available to a domestic violence survivor should not be denied a low-income sexual assault victim just because her attacker was not a family member.
- **The cap on the assistance amount assistance now covers fewer emergency needs.** The \$1,200 cap on the assistance available was set in 1996, when the program was created. That amount used to be enough to pay for moving costs and first month's rent for a survivor who needed to flee the prior home due to safety threats. However, \$1200 in 1996 dollars is now worth approximately \$800 in today's market, and with the incredibly difficult housing market, survivors are at greater risk. Increasing the allowable assistance amount to \$2,000 would better allow the program to fulfill its purpose of helping survivors with children achieve safety.

This emergency assistance program really works to protect the safety of victims and children. Safety planning in conjunction with assistance allows survivors an individualized assessment of how best to address need. This program enables victims to take swift action they may not otherwise be able to afford in order to improve the safety and stability of the entire family. Passage of SB 503 will ensure that the program fulfills its potential to help all victims become survivors. For these reasons, we respectfully urge your Aye vote.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.