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Testimony in Support of HB 2758
House Health Care Committee
February 25th, 2015
Submitted by Sybil Hebb

Chair Greenlick, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 2758, which would provide important privacy protections for sensitive health care information. This protection is particularly important for victims of domestic and sexual violence, who have safety concerns in addition to privacy concerns.

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.

Confidentiality and privacy for victims of domestic or sexual violence seeking services and care are critical to effective treatment and recovery. Sharing information without a victim's permission directly threatens his or her safety, autonomy, and confidence in treatment services. In domestic violence situations, the policy-holder may be the abuser, and disclosure of sensitive information could lead to threats against the victim. Without assurances of confidentiality, victims may not seek treatment, or may not disclose the true nature of their medical needs, thus compromising the efficacy of services.

HB 2758 will protect sensitive health information from being sent to those other than the patient, unless the patient affirmatively consents, thus ensuring greater access to care for victims with safety concerns. For these reasons, we respectfully urge your support. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.