

To: Chair Barker and members of the House Committee on Judiciary

From: Liesl Wendt, Director - Multnomah County Department of Human Services

Date: March 5, 2015

RE: Support for HB 2628

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Multnomah County Human Services Department supports House Bill 2628.

Stalking is unpredictable and dangerous. Nationally, one in six women and one in 19 men have experienced stalking victimization at some point during their lifetime in which they felt very fearful or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed. Furthermore, the majority of stalking victims are stalked by someone they know. Stalking victimization not only affects the direct victim, but can have large ramifications on victim's family members and support systems.

Having children in common with a stalker may amplify the likelihood of interaction, thus increasing the opportunity for the stalker to access the victim. Partner stalking victims and violent partners with children in common are 8.4 times more likely to experience threats of child harm or interference. Victim mothers often report fear of child custody if child protective services or the courts believe the children are at risk in the home, enhancing their vulnerability. Ensuring the safety and welfare of the victim and their children is critical to supporting families experiencing stalking.

Beyond the potential use of children as leverage for a stalker, many victims also report animal abuse and threats from their perpetrators. Overall, 71% of pet-owning women entering women's shelters reported that their perpetrator had injured, maimed, killed or threatened family pets for revenge or control. When the victim is completely dependent on this pet as a service or therapy animal, their vulnerability escalates. Ensuring the animal's safety is absolutely critical to support the safety and independence of the victim.

Passage of this bill would create the necessary measures to protect the safety and welfare of stalking victims, their children and any service/therapy animals. As a community, we cannot continue to place victims at amplified risk. This bill provides critical language to ensure victim accessibility to courts for stalking orders and expands necessary relief to protect children and animals. In addition, the legislation aligns with the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) requirements. As a recipient of federal Office of Violence Against Women funding, Multnomah County supports this alignment to ensure continued funding opportunities to safeguard the welfare of our most vulnerable populations.

As Director of Multnomah County Department of Human Services, I'm proud to stand with the advocates behind this important legislation. As a public agency, it is our responsibility to support the safety of our communities.