

OREGON LAW CENTER

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**Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 492
Before the Senate Workforce Committee
March 18th, 2015**

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I submit this testimony in support of SB 492, which would make a small change in Oregon's current safe leave laws for victims of domestic and sexual violence. The availability of this relief would be of assistance to our clients who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Thank you for your work, and for the opportunity to submit testimony this afternoon.

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 needs are related to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We know from our work that domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking are serious public health and safety issues in Oregon and that survivors face many barriers in their quest to achieve safety. These barriers can trap victims in a cycle of poverty and abuse that impacts their lives and the lives of their children in innumerable ways.

The Oregon Legislature in 2007 recognized the importance of removing workplace barriers to safety for victims and their children and passed, with overwhelming bi-partisan support, a law that gives victims the right to take reasonable *unpaid* leave from work if necessary to take steps to become safer. The law allows victims the right to take leave, and provides employers the ability to seek documentation of eligibility and to limit the amount of leave if necessary to prevent an undue burden to the employer. Under ORS 659A.270 to 659A.285, leave is allowed to:

- Make a police report or get legal help;
- Get medical or mental health assistance;
- Attend a court hearing for a protective order;
- Meet with a domestic or sexual violence advocate;
- Relocate to a safer home or secure an existing home.

For survivors able to take leave, we know that the law has been a valuable tool in providing increased safety and stability. Clients have told us that the right to take time off from work to obtain a restraining order, meet with an attorney, or change the locks on their homes so they are secure has made all the difference for them and their children. For those who cannot afford to lose any income, however, the current leave law can be a hollow remedy.

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The current safe leave law allows victims to use any accrued vacation time, but does not authorize the use of accrued sick leave or personal business days. This bill would expand the types of accrued leave that may be used when a victim needs to take leave for safety reasons, to include sick time or personal business days.

SB 492 will provide a measure of greater flexibility for victims who have accrued leave, to allow them to use that leave if necessary for safety reasons. This will reduce the financial impact of taking leave from work on victims of violence, and help employees make the safety decisions that are right for them.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Sybil Hebb