

Center for HOPE & SAFETY



Formerly Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service

March 26, 2015

RE: HB 2329

Chair Barker, Vice-Chairs Williamson and Olson, and members of the committee:

My name is Jayne Downing and I am the Executive Director of the Center for Hope and Safety in Salem, Oregon. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 2329, which would provide much-needed funding for legal aid services in communities across the state.

Since 1973, the Center for Hope and Safety has offered shelter and support to victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking. We provide 24 hour advocacy, safety planning, and shelter screening every day of the week. In addition to serving victims of violence seeking to escape abuse, we work to eliminate the causes of domestic violence through prevention education, community outreach, and policy work.

Violence against an intimate partner is a serious public health and safety issue in Oregon. Over 37% of Oregon women have experienced physical violence, rape, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Oregon ranks number two in the nation in the number of women who have experienced some type of sexual violence in their lifetime. Intimate Partner Violence also affects children, and men, in our communities.

Victims fleeing abuse must access a variety of services in order to establish safety for themselves and their children. Survivors are at an increased risk of harm shortly after separation from an abusive partner. Delaying action can result in further abuse. In communities across the state, every single day, survivors seek assistance from programs like ours. They tell us their top two needs are housing, and civil legal services. Without a safe place to stay, victims risk homelessness or must return to an abuser. Without civil legal assistance, victims cannot take the steps they need to achieve long-term safety.

Access to civil legal assistance helps victims obtain protection orders, and safe custody and parenting time orders for their children. Civil legal assistance can help victims address legal complications with employers or landlords caused by the violence, and can ensure safety in housing and at the workplace. Victims often need legal help in the complicated process of dis-entangling financially from an abuser. Without legal assistance, it can be impossible for victims to establish safety, stability, and security for their families. One study has identified access to legal aid in a community as a significant factor in reducing domestic violence.

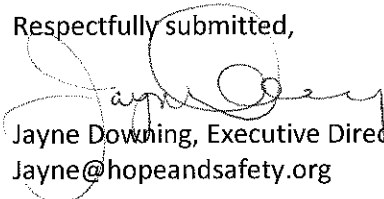
In the 24 years I have been doing this work, I have seen thousands of individuals in need of civil legal assistance who have not been able to access it due to lack of resources. Your support for HB 2329 would provide much-needed capacity at legal aid offices across the state, so that more help is available for the survivors who are doing their very best to escape abuse and rebuild their lives free from violence.

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because everyone deserves a life free of violence

Civil legal assistance for victims in crisis is critical to establishing safety and rebuilding a life free from violence. When victims can take the steps they need to achieve safety, the benefit inures not only to survivors, but to their families, co-workers, the workplace, and our communities. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,



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