

# OREGON LAW CENTER

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Portland, OR 97204

**TESTIMONY ON SB 5516  
Before the Public Safety Subcommittee  
of the Joint Ways and Means Committee  
March 30th, 2015  
Presented by Sybil Hebb**

Co-Chairs Shields and Williamson, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I submit this written testimony in support of the budget for the Crime Victim Services Division (CVSD) of the Oregon Department of Justice. The services funded through CVSD are absolutely critical to the safety of our clients who are victims of domestic or sexual violence.

As you may know, the Oregon Law Center provides statewide civil legal services to low-income Oregonians. We prioritize the provision of services to the neediest Oregonians, and much of our work is focused on ensuring that victims of domestic violence and sexual assault receive the help and support they need in seeking and protection for themselves and their children. OLC views domestic and sexual violence as critical public health and safety issues that can have a disastrous impact well beyond their primary victims. All of the programs for victims funded through the Crime Victim Services Division are vitally important components of the state's response to the needs of victims, and serve to help victims and their children escape, redress, and recover from domestic violence and sexual assault.

**The Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund (ODSVS)** is a vital source of funding for Oregon's non-profit domestic violence and sexual assault service providers and is the only General Fund source of dollars for these services. These funds provide victims and their children with confidential shelter, support, and safety planning services that save lives, and we hope to see this fund increased above current levels to \$10 million for the biennium.

Despite recent groundbreaking investments in these services, for which we are deeply grateful, deficits persist which leave us unable to meet the current need. In 2013, there were more than 12,000 requests for shelter by adults that couldn't be met. 48% of adults seeking shelter have at least one child with them, substantially increasing the impact of this shortfall.

ODSVS dollars are prevention dollars. Expert safety -planning and support services provided by advocates and programs receiving these funds help victims identify and explore real options to escape violence. A recent study has shown that access to shelter and support services leads to a 60-70% reduction in severity

and incidence of re-assault.<sup>1</sup> Survivors linked with advocates during the post-crisis period report higher quality of life, more social supports and less re-victimization for themselves and their children.<sup>2</sup>

Lack of services can force victims and their children back into violence. Almost half (46%) of homeless women reported that they had previously stayed in an abusive relationship because they had nowhere else to go.<sup>3</sup> Domestic violence and sexual assault are a critical public safety issue, and the victim service providers play an essential role in providing safety resources. Statistics from the Department of Human Services indicate that domestic violence is one of the top three drivers bringing founded cases of child abuse into the child welfare system. Providing safety from violence in the home has a direct impact on child safety.

**The Address Confidentiality Program is an important safety tool serving 459 Oregon households who currently need address confidentiality for protection from persistent abusers.** This program serves more than 2,000 Oregonians who have been forced to move, sometimes repeatedly, due to persistent safety threats. By providing an official confidential address, the ACP makes it harder for abusers to track victims down using public records. The ACP not only protects the safety of victims and their children, it enables a measure of stability and normalcy by facilitating the safe participation in activities that would otherwise have been dangerous.

**The Crime Victim Compensation Program provides important benefits to victims who are part of a prosecution process.** In the aftermath of crime, the trauma and damage to a victim and the victim's immediate family can be immense. The CVC program can provide payment for medical and counseling expenses, funeral expenses, loss of support, sexual assault exams, and rehabilitation services necessary as a result of a crime. Victims who are participating in a prosecution process are eligible for payments. These benefits can be particularly helpful to low-income victims, who would otherwise have little hope of accessing these services.

**We also urge support for funding of the DA-VAP funds.** DA-VAP funds provide support for victim assistance advocates stationed at district attorney offices across the state, to help crime victims navigate the prosecution process. For those victims who choose to make reports to law enforcement or who are otherwise participating in the criminal justice process, DA-VAP services help make that process more manageable. DA-VAPs are an important part of the coordinated community response serving the needs of victims.

**The Sexual Assault Task Force (SATF) helps lead and inform the state's coordinated response to sexual assault cases.** The SATF oversees important training and technical assistance for Oregon's sexual assault response teams. The SATF convenes the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Certification Commission, to ensure access to medical-forensic care for adult and adolescent sexual assault victims. The SATF has done excellent work throughout the state in bringing stakeholders together to improve the response to campus sexual assault. The SATF has played a critical role in improving our state's coordinated response to sexual violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacquelyn Campbell PhD RN FAAN, Anna D. Wolf Endowed Chair and professor, Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing: Multi-City Intimate Partner Femicide Study, Funded by NIDA/NIAA, NIMH, CDC, NIJ VAWA R01 DA/AA1156

<sup>2</sup> Sullivan, C. M., Bybee, D. I., & Allen, N. E. (2002). Findings From a Community-Based Program for Battered Women and Their Children. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 17, 915.

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**The AG's Domestic Violence Resource Prosecutor (DVRP) has played a critical role in improving the investigation and prosecution of domestic violence cases throughout Oregon.**

Since 2010, the DVRP has provided training to approximately 2,400 Oregon law enforcement, prosecutors, lawyers, advocates, medical personnel, and other professionals. On average, the DVRP provides technical assistance to 10-12 different agencies per month in counties across the state on DV-related issues. The benefit of this training and technical assistance spills over to those with whom prosecutors and law enforcement work or interact, victims, the public, court personnel, defense attorneys, civil attorneys, and others. The DVRP co-chairs the statewide, multi-agency, DV Fatality Review Team; is the immediate past Chair of the statewide Firearms and DV Task Force; and represents the Attorney General on the Governor's DV Council, as well as on the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force. This position has made a major difference in the state's approach to meeting the needs of domestic violence victims.

**The creation of a Statewide Elder Abuse Prosecutor position would similarly allow Oregon to develop statewide expertise and focus on bringing to justice those who exploit and abuse vulnerable seniors.**

Like domestic violence, elder abuse prosecution adds a particular layer of complexity due to the frequency with which the crime has been perpetrated by someone the senior trusts. Creating a specialized resource position staffed by an expert who understands the dynamics of shame and dependence that can arise in this area will be instrumental in both holding individuals accountable and ensuring that senior victims of crimes feel supported and empowered to participate in the judicial system.

**In closing, ODSVS services are a critical foundation for victims seeking shelter, safety and support in escaping domestic or sexual violence.** These services help victims make decisions about safety steps that are right for them, and facilitate victims' efforts to access other services as part of their safety plan. The DA-VAP, Crime Victim Compensation, and ACP programs are all important parts of the network of services that a victim may choose to access as part of a safety plan. And the SATF, Domestic Violence Resource Prosecutor, and Elder Abuse Resource Prosecutor are all critical to ensuring that the state system partners in the community response to these forms of violence against particularly vulnerable victims is victim-centered, trauma-informed, and coordinated with other community partners.

I thank the committee members for their time and attention to this issue, and would be glad to answer any questions or to provide more information at the committee's request.

Sincerely,

Sybil Hebb  
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Oregon Law Center