

# OREGON LAW CENTER

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## **Testimony in Support of SB 525A-4**

**Senate Rules Committee**

**Submitted By: Sybil Hebb**

**May 12th, 2015**

Chair Rosenbaum, Vice-Chair Ferrioli, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I submit this testimony in support of SB 525A with the Dash 4 amendments.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income vulnerable populations. A significant number of our clients come to us for help as they are struggling to escape or recover from domestic violence. Domestic and sexual violence 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. All too often, domestic violence can be lethal. OLC is committed to supporting the coordinated community response necessary to help prevent this violence, and to help victims in crisis move towards the safety and stability they need for recovery.

Every year, an average of twenty-nine Oregonians are killed in domestic violence incidents. These deaths include women, men, and children, and between 2003 and 2014, occurred in 31 of 36 counties. Deaths include primary victims, children and family members of the victim, responding officers, colleagues, and bystanders. The impact of these fatalities reverberates through our communities. The majority (at least 60%) of domestic violence deaths are by firearm. Domestic violence assaults with firearms are 12x more likely to end in a fatality.

Since the mid-90's, the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has prohibited the possession of firearms or ammunition by certain adjudicated domestic violence offenders. However, federal law is currently almost impossible to implement in Oregon. There are a limited number of federal law enforcement officers in the state, and local law enforcement officers are not authorized to enforce federal law. But it is local law enforcement on the streets and in our communities, interacting with domestic abusers and victims, who most need the tools to protect victims.

SB 525A with the Dash 4 amendments will create state firearm prohibitions modeled after the current federal prohibitions found in the Violence Against Women Act. By incorporating these prohibitions into Oregon's statutes, they will be practically enforceable at the state level, and will provide the protection victims need.

While the bill as amended is a compromise, it is an important step forward in our state's response to domestic violence. We urge you to pass SB 525A with the Dash 4 amendments in order to provide the criminal justice system with the tools it needs to protect victims and reduce tragic deaths.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.