

Testimony in Support of HB 3476

Submitted to the Senate Committee on Judiciary

Submitted by: Jessica Amo, PSU Women's Resource Center Director

May 12, 2015

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Kruse, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Jessica Amo and I am the Director of the Portland State University Women's Resource Center, and Co-Chair of the Sexual Assault Task Force's Campus Subcommittee. I have spent the past 17 years working directly with survivors of sexual assault and relationship violence, and am in my seventh year of running a campus-based direct-service advocacy program at Portland State University.

The core premise of my work is that students have the right to safely access their education. Sexual assault and relationship violence impede that access: student survivors may be unable to attend their regular classes, go to their campus job, live in their residence hall or even just hang out on campus due to fear of sharing space with or being found by the person who hurt them. While there are many definitive steps that our school can (and does) take to address student safety, I find that students face many barriers in deciding to make a report that would trigger interventions. Perhaps the biggest barrier is the fear of disclosure without consent. I've had students tell me that they don't want to "make a big deal," "cause a scene," and especially don't want to "be that girl" whom everyone talks about after they make a report. I've had a student tell me that having her friends fail to believe her was worse than the assault itself - and what's the point in reporting if no one believes you? I've talked to student survivors afraid of retaliation, getting the perpetrator "in trouble," or losing friends.

The most critical step we can take to address these barriers is to give student survivors a safe, confidential place to work through their process and come to their own decisions about what action is right for them. My staff and I are committed to giving students a full range of service options, and supporting them in making informed choices about how to move forward. However, without the protection of a statutory privilege we are limited in the conversations that student survivors can have with us. When they cannot safely tell us all of the issues they are navigating we are limited in our ability to offer comprehensive safety planning and service options. Students are more likely to decide to make a report or access services when they have access to a trusted support person. Currently, if a student accidentally forgets that we are not confidential and shares reportable information with us, we have to immediately make a mandatory report that may trigger an administrative process. This can damage our relationship with the student and potentially remove the student's autonomy at a time when it is critical that they retain control.

Passage of this bill will allow advocates to offer fully confidential services, thereby increasing our capacity to support student safety.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Amo, M.P.A
Director