

From the Desk of Sara Gelseg  
SAG



## Support HB 2700. Support Survivors of Violence.

Raphael House is a multi-faceted domestic violence prevention/intervention agency dedicated to fighting the causes and effects of intimate partner violence in a variety of ways. We offer emergency shelter in a confidential location, safety planning and advocacy on a 24-hour in-house crisis line, and transitional housing and advocacy services to survivors of domestic violence enrolled in our Transitional Housing Program.

In addition to serving a diverse community of women and children escaping domestic violence, Raphael House also works to eliminate the causes of family and intimate partner violence through prevention education, in schools and through local and statewide policy work.

We know that a powerful way abusers control their partner is by systematically taking a survivor's voice away, and thus their access to other people, systems, safety, and ultimately, alter their belief that they even deserve to have a voice.

**For the 85,000 Oregon women who reported having been abused by their partner in the past five years, access to legal assistance is a pressing need, a way to get their voice back and find justice.** Unfortunately, this access is also not a reality for many survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Survivors that work with legal advocates through the Oregon's legal aid services have someone who has an intricate understanding of the legal system on their side, to speak the language of the law (and in Sylvia's case, the land), and give them access to rights that many victims of crime, survivors of violence, were not even aware were available to them.

**Forty percent of cases Oregon's legal aid services take on are family law cases, and most of those involve domestic violence.** Just like for Sylvia, these services are critical to survivors of violence to have a voice within civil justice system.

Sylvia had been with her abusive partner since she was a teenager. She had limited ability to communicate in English and her husband had systematically abused her and their children for more than a decade. Her kids showed obvious signs of trauma, and so did she. She didn't feel confident advocating for herself because her husband constantly threatened that no one would believe her if she filed for divorce and legal custody of their children. He spoke English fluently and was well-respected in the community they lived.

Sylvia didn't feel safe pressing criminal charges against her partner, for fear of retaliation, and there wasn't an opportunity to call the police before she left to come to shelter. She wanted a clean break, to start over, but didn't think she would be taken seriously because of her limited ability to communicate in English, and because her husband had convinced her she didn't deserve to feel credible.

Sylvia was able to gain access to legal representation through legal aid, and coupled with the help of advocates at Raphael House, she obtained a protection order, was eventually granted a divorce, and fought for full legal custody of her children. She had access to justice, and understood that she deserved to have her rights be respected and honored thanks to being given a voice within the civil justice system.