



**Testimony in Support of SB 826
Senate Committee on Judiciary
March 22, 2017**

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 826, which would protect the privacy and confidentiality of sexual assault and domestic violence victims seeking safety and support services from Tribal victim advocates.

This bill would close a gap in current law passed in 2015, which unfortunately failed to include Tribal advocates in the definition of those qualifying for protection. As one of the advocates who worked on HB 3476 in 2015, I am sorry for this oversight and pleased to be able to advocate in support of passage of SB 826 to remedy the problem.

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 suffer great psychological, emotional, and physical trauma, which have long term impact on their lives. Domestic and sexual violence greatly contribute to the vulnerability of our clients, and further trap them in poverty and crisis. OLC is committed to supporting the coordinated community response necessary to help prevent this violence, and to helping victims in crisis move towards the safety and stability they need for recovery.

Victims need confidential, trauma-informed, and culturally-specific support services. Confidentiality between a victim and a domestic or sexual violence advocate is critical to effective access to services and options for safety. Without assurances of confidentiality, victims may never seek help from support services. If they do seek help, they may not disclose the true nature of abuse or assault, compromising their safety and undermining effective interventions. Worst of all, without assurances of confidentiality, victims may stay in unsafe situations and suffer more abuse or assault. Studies indicate that the primary reason survivors do not come forward to make reports, or to access the help they need, is that they fear disclosure without their consent.

2015's HB 3476 established statutory confidentiality protection for the communications between survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their victim advocates at community-based non-profit victim advocacy agencies and at campus-based counseling centers. This new law prevents and protects against the disclosure of confidential communications without the consent of the survivor, unless otherwise required by law. It is important to ensure that tribal advocates providing similar services are covered by these protections.

Access to confidential services means victims can come forward for help and support without fear of retribution or embarrassment. Confidentiality allows victims to take the time they need to consider their options and make the reporting or other choices that are right for them. SB 826 will ensure that survivors seeking services from tribal advocates receive the confidentiality they need and deserve. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.