



**Testimony in Support of SB 795
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 795, which would help to fully implement strong policy enacted more than a decade ago to support sexual assault survivors.

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.

In 2005, Oregon passed an important piece of legislation allowing survivors of sexual assault the right to choose a "personal representative" to be present as an advocate to lend comfort and support during the process of getting a medical-forensic exam in the aftermath of a violent crime. When this law was passed, it was an important recognition of the need for survivor support and an important step forward for crime victims in Oregon.

However, it is too often the case that survivors are unaware of the option to have support during this time, or unaware of how to access that support. SB 795 will ensure consistent policy across the state to provide survivors seeking medical forensic exams with access to a victim advocate at the time of the exam. The bill requires medical providers or law enforcement to contact a victim advocate and make reasonable efforts to ensure that the advocate is present and available at the medical facility when the medical exam occurs. The victim may decline services at any time, of course, but if needed, services are available without barrier.

In the immediate aftermath of a violent assault, the process of obtaining a medical forensic exam can be a layer of additional trauma. The availability of advocacy, support, and crisis intervention for the survivor, as well as for family members and friends, can make a big difference in the survivor's healing process. In addition, access to information about resources, crime victims' compensation, and safety planning can help ensure the survivor has access to follow-up services and ongoing support.

SB 795 adds a simple protocol to the current law to ensure better implementation of good and long-established policy. Passage of the bill will help victims in the immediate aftermath of violent crime to access services and mitigate trauma. For these reasons, we urge an Aye vote. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.