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Testimony of Arthur Towers

on Senate Bill 5526

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services

March 28, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I come before you today to discuss the need for increased funding for staffing and training in long-term care.

There are a growing number of OTLA members who fight for victims of elder abuse. Sadly, our members report a meaningful increase in the number of cases of elder abuse that come to their attention. We don't know if this is related to demographic growth in the number of elderly, or if there is some other change that is causing the increase.

Our members get involved at the very end of the process, after the abuse occurs, after the family discovers it, and only if there is enough emotional energy and strength on the family's part to move forward with legal action. We worry that a number of cases never come to our members' attention. It can be very difficult to bring a civil suit much less win a civil suit on behalf of a victim of abuse or neglect or on behalf of their family.

There is a significant need for improved accountability in this field. Too many conversations with family members end with, "Yes, your loved one was injured. Yes, it is pretty clear who was responsible. But no, your access to justice is very limited and you probably cannot hold the abuser accountable."

But I come before this committee because another common thread in these cases is that improved staffing levels, or better-trained staff could prevent the abuse in the first place. We want consumers to have safe, high-quality long-term care, and one part of the equation is more funding. The suffering and trauma caused by

elder abuse is especially difficult for families who feel extreme guilt about placing their loved one in long-term care. Legal recourse will never truly compensate the elderly or their families.

I appreciate the challenges before the committee as you wrestle with impossible choices in a difficult budget environment. Thank you for taking the job so seriously. I do urge that you prioritize this part of the budget. OTLA looks forward to working with you to help make long-term care safer for vulnerable Oregonians.