



Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force

Testimony in support of SB261
Senate Committee on Judiciary
Submitted by: Michele Roland-Schwartz, Executive Director
April 11, 2017

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force, I am pleased to express support for SB261, which would make evidence about sexual behavior or predisposition inadmissible in civil proceeding except under certain circumstances.

SATF is a private, non-profit, non-governmental statewide agency whose mission is to advance a multi-disciplinary, survivor-centered approach to the prevention of and response to sexual violence. Formed in 1999 by the late Attorney General Hardy Myers, in collaboration with statewide leaders, SATF has a proud history of addressing sexual violence in Oregon. The spirit of SATF comes from our membership. Appointed by Attorney General Rosenblum, members serve on 1 of 8 subcommittees including: Campus, Criminal Justice, Legislative & Public Policy, Medical-Forensic, Men's Engagement, Offender Management, Prevention Education, and Victim Response.

Oregon is second in the nation in rates of violence against women¹, and yet the crime of sexual violence largely goes unreported. Victims are often unaware of their rights, resources and pathways to justice; this combined with an overwhelming sense of shame, guilt, fear of retaliation, and concerned that others may not believe them, means that victims often suffer in silence. SB261 would reduce barriers to justice by ensuring that any past sexual behavior is inadmissible in court. The sexual history of a survivor is not relevant in any sexual assault case, and relying on it as evidence speaks to victim-blaming attitudes present in our approach to sexual assault, while focusing attention away from the behavior of the perpetrator. Introducing past sexual behavior only serves to further embarrass victims and reduces the likelihood that they will seek justice in both the criminal and civil courts.

For these reasons, SATF encourages your support of SB261.

Respectfully submitted,

Michele Roland-Schwartz
Executive Director

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.
https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS_Report2010-a.pdf