



**Testimony in Support of HB 2621A
Before the House Judiciary Committee**

May 3rd, 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 House Bill 2621A, which would ensure that our state's crime victim compensation program is most responsive to the needs of crime survivors. We greatly appreciate the work of our Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum and staff in bringing this bill forward.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. A significant number of our clients come to us for help as they are struggling to escape or recover from domestic or sexual 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 the aftermath of crime.

HB 2621A would modify the Crime Victims' Compensation Program administered by the Department of Justice to ensure greater accessibility to compensation for injuries and damages suffered by victims of domestic and sexual violence. The availability of compensation for victims is a crucial aspect of our system of justice. Many victims, particularly low-income survivors, will not be able to access the care and services they need on the road to recovery without access to the compensation program. Reducing barriers to the program will improve Oregon's response to the needs of vulnerable victims.

Specifically, the bill amends the program to increase the qualifying reporting options and expand access to counseling services in acknowledgement that for many victims of domestic and sexual violence, the very process of initiating proceedings against a perpetrator can substantially increase the danger and risk of trauma to the victim. By expanding qualifying reporting options to include such things as seeking a protective order or a forensic medical exam, the bill will provide much needed assistance to victims whose injuries or trauma would otherwise go untreated, and who might otherwise be further alienated by the justice system. By expanding access to counseling services and increasing the amount of compensation provided, the bill will ensure that more vulnerable victims get help with the significant psychological and emotional trauma that often accompanies physical injuries.

For all of the above reasons, we respectfully urge support of HB 2621A. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Sybil Hebb