



Melissa Erlbaum, MPA  
Executive Director

May 8, 2017  
House Committee on the Judiciary  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

**Re: Support for SB 795A**

Chair Barker, Vice-Chairs Olsen and Williamson, and members of the Committee:

My name is Melissa Erlbaum, and I am the executive director of Clackamas Women's Services (CWS), a community-based non-profit agency that has supported survivors of domestic and sexual violence, stalking, and elder abuse on their pathways to safety and stability for over 30 years. I am writing today in support of SB 795A, which would increase access to safety and other critical supports for the women we serve, as well as countless other survivors across the state.

The need for this legislation is stark. Oregon has one of the highest rates of domestic violence and sexual assault in the nation, as over 1 in 3 women (37%) will experience rape or physical violence in their lifetime. Further, more than 85,000 Oregon women report having been physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate or recently intimate partner within the last 5 years. Passage of SB 795A would ensure that all individuals who experience sexual assault have the ability to meet with an advocate in person to receive additional support and to make informed decisions about their care. Without these supports, too many survivors are forced to navigate labyrinthine medical and social service systems alone.

The benefits of SB 795A for survivors are manifold. Allowing an advocate to be present during an exam provides immediate support for survivors, and helps inform them of and connect them to critical resources, such as: the Address Confidentiality Program, Counseling resources, safety planning, Crime Victims' Compensation, and follow-up services to provide ongoing support. Additionally, SB 795A will not impede any emergency medical care needed or the collection of forensic evidence, and will serve to better enable SANE and Law Enforcement officers to focus on providing medical treatment and conducting investigations. Further, SB 795A is survivor centered, respecting the autonomy of survivors to make the decisions that are best for them, including declining the services of an advocate if they so choose.

The immediate aftermath of a violent assault is both incredibly traumatic and disorienting. For survivors, access to advocacy, support, and crisis intervention is often vital to their healing process, which the passage of SB 795A will help provide. On behalf of CWS and the women we serve, I urge you to vote yes on SB 795A. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Melissa Erlbaum', is written in black ink.

Melissa Erlbaum, MPA  
Executive Director, Clackamas Women's Services