



Melissa Erlbaum, MPA
Executive Director

May 24, 2017
Senate Judiciary Committee
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Testimony in support of HB 2807

Chair Prozanski and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Melissa Erlbaum, and I am the executive director of Clackamas Women's Services (CWS). For over 30 years, our organization has provided critical services — including emergency and confidential shelter, a 24/7 crisis line, mental health counseling, support groups, legal advocacy, and community education — to survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, elder abuse, and human trafficking. Despite our longevity, there is nothing that would please me more than to be able to shutter our doors — as the result of the total eradication of interpersonal violence in our community.

Unfortunately, however, that dream may never be realized. Our requests for services increase with each passing year, as do the number of victims in our community. For instance, CWS's crisis line received nearly 2,500 calls for emergency shelter services last year, while A Safe Place-Family Justice Center (ASP-FJC), where our main office is located, experienced a total of 3,765 walk-in requests for services, figures which are higher than those in previous years. Further, we are seeing an increasing rise in the diversity of survivors seeking help, and are subsequently serving more people of color, elders, those who identify as having a disability, and others from marginalized communities.

We are a proud member of the Restore Justice for Survivors Coalition because we see, firsthand, how imperative it is for the women and children we serve — as well as those who suffer silently — to know that they have support and that their abusers will be held accountable for their actions through our criminal and civil justice systems. It is empowering for victims to know that a jury of 12 Oregonians, just like them, will hear the facts of the case and determine the outcome impartially.

Sadly, we also often see cases where responsible actions by a business, institution, or organization could have been taken to prevent these violent acts against our clients. Such responses negatively impact victims and effectively create additional barriers to their pursuits of safety and justice. Consequently, when these groups turn a blind eye, refuse to act, or fail to implement policies to protect us, they should be held accountable, as it is often accountability that spurs positive, systemic change.

The tragic story of Betty Rotting demonstrates this. Betty was 73 years old when she was transported by ambulance to the hospital for heart surgery. While in the back of the ambulance, she was sexually assaulted by the EMT who was entrusted with her care. This wasn't the first time this EMT assaulted a patient; there had been numerous complaints to the emergency response company about him throughout his tenure. However, instead of pulling him from service and investigating, the company continued to allow him to be alone with female patients. Betty's assaulter was later sentenced to five

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years in prison and the company was found negligent for doing nothing to protect women patients from this sexual predator. As a result of Betty's case — as well as the cases of 5 of his other victims — the emergency response company made changes to the ambulance design; there is no longer a wall between the driver and the EMT/patient area, enabling the driver to have an unobstructed view of the back of the ambulance. This a clear example of positive policy change coming from holding institutions accountable and demanding better and safer systems.

As this story and countless others attest, survivors deserve justice. We can no longer afford to sit idly by and allow abuses to take place without accountability. I hope you will join us in our desire to restore justice by supporting House Bill 2807.

Sincerely,

Melissa Erlbaum
Clackamas Women's Services, Executive Director



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