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Testimony in Support of HB 3279
Joint Ways and Means Sub-Committee on Transportation and Economic Development
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Co-Chairs Johnson and Gomberg, and Members of the Sub-Committee,

I submit this testimony on behalf of the Oregon Law Center in support of HB 3279, which would take steps to provide important protections for vulnerable janitorial and security workers against sexual assault and harassment on the job.

As you know, OLC is a statewide non-profit entity whose mission is to provide access to justice for low-income Oregonians through the provision of the highest quality civil legal services. Many of our clients seek our assistance to address legal issues related to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. These issues greatly contribute to the vulnerability of our clients, and further trap them in poverty.

The effects of sexual assault can be immeasurable. In addition to the immediate physical injuries sustained, victims can suffer significant long-term mental health impacts, increased likelihood of alcohol and other drug abuse, and lost work time and productivity. Victims' family members often suffer similar impacts.

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center reports that the United States Department of Justice estimates that eight percent of rapes occur while the victim is working. Between 2005 and 2009, rape of sexual assault accounted for 2.3% of all non-fatal violence in the workplace. One study of employed women found that 38% had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. ⁱ

Too often, OLC hears first-hand from vulnerable Oregonians who have suffered sexual violence at the workplace. When a survivor's economic security is dependent upon returning to work, she may have no choice but to return to the scene of an assault, often to continue working with a perpetrator. It is a priority for us to help survivors in these circumstances, and to be a part of the coordinated community response necessary to prevent such violence.

Oregon has long recognized that an effective response to domestic and sexual violence requires coordination among many elements of the community. However, the importance of employers in the response to sexual violence has been under-recognized. When an employee is assaulted at work, her economic security is threatened in addition to the physical and other health threats she suffers. The workplace as a whole is impacted: absenteeism, interrupted job performance, and loss of experienced employees are only some of the costs that employers bear as a direct result of sexual violence.

By requiring training regarding sexual harassment and assault prior to licensing of janitorial services contractors, HB 3279 will ensure greater protection for employees whose working conditions (at night, often in isolation) often make them more vulnerable to abuse.

Safety from abuse in the workplace is essential in order to allow employees the opportunity to support themselves and their families without risking their mental or physical health. This bill is an important step forward in ensuring protection against abuse for a vulnerable population of workers whose physical work settings put them at great risk. We thank the sponsors and advocates for their leadership in bringing this bill forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

¹ http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_overview_sexual-violence-workplace.pdf