



**Testimony in Support of HB 4150A
Before the Senate Committee on Education
February 26th, 2018
Submitted by: Sybil Hebb**

Chair Roblan, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, I submit this testimony in support of HB 4150A, which will provide a model for K-12 school districts to ensure consistent and clear policies regarding sexual harassment, so that students know their rights, how to make reports, and where they can find help. The bill is one step in ensuring best practice response to and prevention of sexual harassment of Oregon students.

As you know, the Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Over the years, the Law Center has seen an increasing number of clients whose civil legal issues are related to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. These issues greatly contribute to the vulnerability of our clients, and further trap them in poverty and crisis. We are committed to improving the coordinated community and system response necessary to help stop this violence. In accomplishing this goal, focusing efforts on protection of young people is of the utmost importance. Prevention of violence and victimization of young Oregonians can also lead to reductions in drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, and other crises that impact individuals, families, and communities.

Teens and young people are especially vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Approximately one in three adolescent girls in the United States is a victim of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner, according to the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2008). And young people aged 12-19 experience the highest rates of rape and sexual assault in our country.¹ More than half of Oregon rape victims are under 17 years old. This is a problem that affects boys as well as girls: One in ten high school students has been purposefully hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend.

There is a strong correlation between sexual assault and harassment experienced at a young age and future health and social problems. Teens who are victims are more likely than their non-abused peers to smoke, use drugs, engage in risky sexual behaviors, and attempt or consider suicide.² Teens who are victims are more likely to do poorly in school, or to skip school entirely

¹ Truman, Jennifer and Rand, Michael. 2010. *Criminal Victimization, 2009*. U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available at <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv09.pdf>.

² Silverman, J, Raj A, et al. 2001. Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality. *JAMA*. 286:572-579. Available at <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/286/5/572>.



**Oregon
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WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE FOR LOW INCOME OREGONIANS

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because they feel unsafe. The severity of adult intimate partner violence is often greater in cases where the pattern of abuse was established in adolescence.

HB 4150A is an important first step in creating a road map for the prevention of sexual harassment and violence in our schools and against our young people. The bill will ensure that students know their rights and options, and will communicate important standards to our young people. For these reasons, we urge an “Aye” vote.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sybil Hebb
Oregon Law Center