



Oregon Crime Victims Law Center

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Dear Chair Bynum, Vice-Chair Power, Vice-Chair Sprenger, and members of the Committee:

The long-term effects of the current pandemic on the state of Oregon and across the country are unknown, but we know with certainty that there will be significant impacts felt likely for years to come. While the effects of the current shutdown on the economy can be measured, more uncertain are the ramifications on one of Oregon's most vulnerable populations, the victims of domestic abuse. We know that there has been a significant rise in the number of calls to domestic violence hotlines throughout the nation. The necessary stay-at-home orders have trapped victims in isolation with their abusers. These victims, most often women and children, have nowhere to go to escape the violence and there is no break from the perpetrator. Additionally, victims may have a harder time seeking help when they are trapped with their abuser all day. With shelters at capacity and a reduced number of beds available, there are few options for those looking to escape violence at home.

The Oregon Crime Victims Law Center provides free legal representation to victims of crime throughout the state, and the majority of clients we serve are victims of domestic violence and/or sexual abuse. We provide victims with attorneys to assist them in asserting their rights in criminal cases and we also represent victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in contested restraining order hearings. Since the state's stay-at-home order went into effect, OCVLC's advocate and attorneys have answered hundreds of calls from victims looking for help. Many victims are uncertain how to obtain a protective order during the pandemic, or are afraid of going to the courthouse to do so. We've had calls from victims who have had to whisper or speak in code so as not to alert their abuser that they are seeking help. There have been callers who want to file a protective order but are afraid they'd have to leave the house and have nowhere to go. And we've had calls from victims who desperately want to get their children away from their abuser, but they are afraid of making the situation even worse.

Since the state's stay-at-home order went into effect, OCVLC has continued to provide legal representation, assistance, and advocacy to victims. We have appeared in courts by phone, by videoconference, and in person to assist victims and ensure that their voices are heard. The last few weeks have seen a significant increase in the number of calls we receive, and we believe that, as counties begin to open, we will soon see an even greater number of victims seeking assistance. In speaking with other community-based advocacy groups this seems to be the consensus, and we are all preparing as best as we can. We know people are essentially frozen in place right now. When the orders are lifted, there will be a spike in victims needing services. Oregon has a duty to ensure that its vulnerable populations are protected and has access to essential services to assist them. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rosemary W. Brewer
Executive Director