



Debra Dority  
State Support Unit Attorney  
522 SW Fifth Ave., Ste. 812  
Portland, OR 97204  
P: 503.473.8323  
[ddority@oregonlawcenter.org](mailto:ddority@oregonlawcenter.org)

To: Senate Judiciary Committee  
From: Debra Dority, Oregon Law Center  
Date: June 2, 2020  
Re: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault during the COVID-19 Emergency

Chair Prozanski and members of the Committee:

The Oregon Law Center (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, sexual harassment, and stalking. These issues greatly contribute to the vulnerability of our clients, and further trap them in poverty.

Survivors of domestic and sexual violence are experiencing unique and significant harm during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The stressors that so many are experiencing right now such as sudden job loss, financial stress, and a loss of social support systems are factors that are also known to increase rates of domestic and sexual violence. In addition, a common tactic of abusers is to isolate victims in order to control them and make it harder to access help, and the pandemic and public health risks are forcing many to spend more time at home than usual. Many survivors are unable to leave a dangerous situation in order to seek help from advocates and attorneys to obtain restraining orders or safety planning. Crisis calls to law enforcement and domestic violence programs in Oregon<sup>1</sup> and nationally<sup>2</sup> have spiked during the pandemic. It's impossible to quantify how many survivors may be in need but are not reaching out right now, but Oregon DHS reports a 44% reduction in April in requests for Temporary Assistance for Domestic Violence Survivors (TA-DVS), a financial assistance grant to support families whose safety is at risk due to domestic violence. There is significant concern that fears of the virus are preventing survivors of sexual assault from seeking medical care and having Sexual Assault Forensic Examinations (SAFEs).<sup>3</sup>

Though Oregon Courts have postponed many legal matters for several months, the courts have prioritized restraining orders, ensuring that they have been available at every courthouse throughout Oregon. OLC and Legal Aid Services of Oregon (LASO), along with other legal services programs such as Oregon Crime Victims Law Center, have continued to provide free legal representation to survivors throughout the pandemic, providing legal advice and both remote and in person representation in restraining order matters throughout the state.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oregonlive.com/crime/2020/03/calls-to-oregons-domestic-violence-crisis-lines-spike-amid-coronavirus-crisis.html> and <https://www.oregonlive.com/coronavirus/2020/05/domestic-violence-services-remain-open-but-many-struggle-to-get-help-as-need-increases-during-coronavirus.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/police-see-rise-domestic-violence-calls-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-n1176151> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/us/domestic-violence-coronavirus.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.abajournal.com/web/article/how-the-pandemic-creates-obstacles-for-sexual-assault-survivors>



# Oregon Law Center

WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE FOR LOW INCOME OREGONIANS

Debra Dority  
State Support Unit Attorney  
522 SW Fifth Ave., Ste. 812  
Portland, OR 97204  
P: 503.473.8323  
[ddority@oregonlawcenter.org](mailto:ddority@oregonlawcenter.org)

However, given the shutdown of many other resources, survivors may not be aware that such resources are still available. For that reason, OLC and LASO created [this resource](#) regarding the availability of restraining orders, legal services, advocacy programs, and general information relevant to survivors during the pandemic. We have submitted this information to the record in both English and Spanish.

As Oregon begins to reopen, we expect an onslaught of survivors who have finally been able to access legal and advocacy services in obtaining restraining orders, or medical services such as SAFE examinations. In addition, once the Courts begin accepting divorce, custody and child support cases again, we expect to receive a significant spike in requests for representation in these areas as well. It is essential that we as advocates, policy makers, and the systems survivors rely on be prepared to help survivors escape and recover from abuse and avoid the increase in poverty that often results.

Sincerely,  
Debra Dority  
State Support Unit Attorney  
Oregon Law Center