



256 Warner Milne Road, Oregon City, OR 97045  
(503) 655-8600 | www.cwsor.org

March 13, 2019

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

### **Testimony in Support of SB 5515**

Dear Co-Chair Winters and Co-Chair Piluso and members of the Committee,

Oregon has one of the highest rates of domestic and sexual violence in the nation, with approximately 1 million women and girls — nearly half of those in the state — affected in their lifetime (Oregon Women's Foundation Count Her In Report, 2016). Over 1 in 3 men in Oregon will also experience rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point (NISVS, 2010). According to Children First for Oregon, 35.3% of founded abuse/neglect/threat of harm referrals in Clackamas County were related to domestic violence last year. In January of 2017 alone, there were 12 DV-related deaths, trending at a 35% increase compared to the previous year.

I know that we are driven to do better in Oregon. ODSVS funding is the key ingredient in that endeavor.

They say that the 'shelf life' of a domestic and sexual violence advocate is under two years. The presumption is that burnout is high because the stories are traumatic and hard to hear over and over. I have worked in this field for 23 years and I can unequivocally tell you that this is not the case. The reality is that 'burnout' is the direct result of lack of resources to do our work, being forced to send victims to numerous different doors to get help or meet basic needs and having to say 'no' so frequently to critical emergency needs because we do not have the adequate funding for core services.

As national attention and media coverage has become more attune to the epidemic of domestic and sexual violence our requests for services has increased. Yet, vital ODSVS is significantly underfunded, currently meeting only 25% of the emergency service levels--- and that is just emergency services. This does not account for the long-term advocacy and support services we know are necessary to reduce re-victimization and more importantly provide an opportunity for healing and mitigates the long-term health consequences of trauma.

Nationally, domestic violence is the third leading cause of homelessness for women and children. However, research finds that women who secure safe and stable housing experience a reduction in re-victimization rates. But with soaring rental costs and plummeting vacancy rates, the difficulty in securing stable and affordable housing is particularly pronounced for victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Consequently, rates of homelessness are on the rise throughout the region and the state. For instance, the 2017 Point-in-Time Homeless Count found that the number of unsheltered individuals increased by 54% and the number of homeless children increased by 35%. In the state, over one-third (33.7%) of the count's respondents reported that they were also victims of domestic violence. Of these individuals, nearly half (46.6%) were unsheltered while only 14.2% had been provided with transitional housing services.

As a result of this we have seen our average length of stay in our emergency shelter increase over 50% over the last two years. Every day we turn away requests for emergency shelter due to a shortage in resources like ODSVS. We have also seen an increase in the complexity of needs presented by victims reaching out for support. This is often due to experiencing multiple forms of domestic and sexual violence over a period of time.

In addition to the shortage of transitional and affordable housing stock, there is also a service provision gap that profoundly impacts victims. The ability to effectively address any critical traumatic event is severely hindered

when the victim experiences on-going trauma such as homelessness or is not able to access support services due to the shortage in funding. Support services are needed to reduce isolation, enhance stability and support the full transition to self-sufficiency.

At CWS' emergency shelter, approximately 50% of those served last year were LEP (limited English proficient), the vast majority of whom were native Spanish speakers. These populations frequently face additional barriers to accessing already scarce resources. ODSVS funds are critical to our ability to provide community-based support services and culturally specific services that are delivered by dedicated and skilled victim advocates/case managers in the CWS' Emergency Shelter, a victim's home, or at our family justice center.

Executive Directors across the state are partnering with you to solve this problem each and every day, and oftentimes nights and countless weekends as well. We work tirelessly in our fundraising efforts to bring in private grants and donations. We diligently work to bring in every local and federal resource and spend numerous hours managing those requirements and stewarding these resources.

ODSVS funding is the only source of funding we have that provides us with the flexibility to meet emergency needs and keep operations open. We rely on it to have some level of stability in our life-saving work. It is time to increase this support—we are asking for you to partner with us to move the dial to meet closer to 50% of the need. It is imperative to victims across the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Erlbaum', written in a cursive style.

Melissa Erlbaum, MPA  
Executive Director