

**Testimony Supporting SB 606
Senate Judiciary Committee
April 3rd, 2019**

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 606, which would establish the Domestic Violence Committee within the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, to study and make recommendations regarding improvements to our criminal justice system's response to domestic violence. I want to thank Senator Winters for her remarkable and steadfast leadership on behalf of survivors, and Chair Prozanski and the committee for their leadership and work on justice system reform issues. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income vulnerable populations. A significant number of our clients come to us for help as they are struggling to escape or recover from domestic violence. Domestic and sexual violence are serious public health and safety issues in our state. Victims and their children suffer great psychological, emotional, and physical trauma, which have long term impact on their lives. These issues greatly contribute to the vulnerability of our clients, and further trap them in poverty and crisis. All too often, domestic violence can be lethal. OLC is committed to supporting the coordinated community response necessary to help prevent this violence, and to help victims in crisis move towards the safety and stability they need for recovery. The criminal justice system is an important element of our state's response to domestic violence, and we support efforts to improve this response.

Oregon has seen reduced crime rates as a whole, yet according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, our reported rates of violence against women are among the highest in the nation.¹ The Women's Foundation of Oregon reports that over a third of Oregon's women — nearly 700,000 individuals—have experienced intimate partner violence.² According to the Oregon Department of Human Services, domestic violence is a contributing factor in approximately 1/3 of all child welfare cases, and approximately 40% of abuse cases involving seniors or people with disabilities.

Each year, a shocking number of Oregonians are killed as a result of domestic violence. Domestic violence accounts for one in four of all Oregon violent deaths. In 2017 alone, 32 people died due to domestic violence.³ From 2003-2014, a total of **321** lives were lost. These deaths include women, men, and children, and occurred in 31 of 36 counties. Deaths include primary victims, children and family members of the victim, responding officers, colleagues, and bystanders. The impact of these fatalities reverberates through our communities.

¹ <https://www.opb.org/news/article/sexual-assault-high-rate-oregon-women-girls-report/>

² <https://womensfoundationoforegon.org/uploads/CountHerInreport.pdf> (page 25)

³ <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2018R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/141641>

Oregon policy-makers, system-responders, service providers, advocates, and others have made great strides in recent years, in prioritizing the prevention of and response to domestic and sexual violence. In recent years, the legislature has enacted confidentiality protections for victims, workplace safety protections, housing protections, and campus protections. And the legislature has also tackled tough criminal justice system questions. Starting in 2013, the Oregon Legislature's Justice Reinvestment Initiative established an approach towards spending criminal justice resources more effectively with the goals of reducing recidivism, decreasing prison use, protecting the public and holding offenders accountable. This ground-breaking work has brought community-based victim advocates into discussion with system responders and has created a framework for multi-disciplinary collaboration.

However, it is clear that we have much work left to do. Domestic violence remains an under-reported crime, and studies indicate that marginalized communities are even less likely than other communities to report crime or to access the criminal justice system. Now is the time for us to reach out to survivor communities to seek feedback, to identify the specific barriers to reporting for victims of this particular crime, and to establish ways to improve victim experiences.

Senate Bill 606 will lay the groundwork for on-going collaboration to address the pervasive problem of domestic violence in our communities across the state. The multi-disciplinary committee established by the bill will allow for a victim-centered and data-driven focus on system improvements. The National Center for State Courts recognizes that collaborations across child welfare agencies, criminal justice courts, domestic violence agencies, law enforcement agencies, and social services can increase cross-system understanding and interactions to improve outcomes for victims.⁴

Domestic violence continues to plague our state, and domestic violence fatalities occur with alarming regularity. Senate Bill 606 will expand upon the good work of the Justice Reinvestment Program. The bill will allow Oregon to continue to lead the way in domestic violence policy, by ensuring that our criminal justice response is grounded in the mission to meet the full continuum of survivor needs. For these reasons, we urge your support of Senate Bill 606.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

⁴ <https://www.ncsc.org/Topics/Children-Families-and-Elders/Domestic-Violence/Resource-Guide.aspx>