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TESTIMONY SUPPORTING SB 962A
House Judiciary Committee
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Chair Williamson, Vice-Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger, and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I submit this written testimony in support of Senate Bill 962A, which would remove barriers to safety for vulnerable victims of certain crimes.

The Oregon Law Center 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. Helping our clients to find safety from domestic and sexual violence is an important part of our work.

Senate bill 962A will streamline and support implementation of the federal U-Visa program in Oregon. The U-Visa program was designed to increase public safety by ensuring that victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking are not deterred from seeing help from law enforcement by a fear of immigration sanctions. Often, abusers use a victim's lack of immigration status as a threat, or tool of further abuse. Perpetrators threaten deportation and immigration sanctions as a means of keeping their victims within their control. Victims who lack status are afraid to seek help, or to cooperate with a law enforcement investigation, for fear of immigration consequences. The U-Visa program was created to help facilitate a pathway to safety for victims, by providing that cooperation with law enforcement will protect against immigration sanctions and provide a pathway to lawful status. In providing this pathway for victims, the U-Visa program was also intended to help improve law enforcement's ability to investigate and prosecute serious crime.

Passage of SB 962A will help the U-Visa program live up to its promise, both for victims and for communities. Currently, implementation of the program is inconsistent. Some agencies have streamlined protocols in place that allow prompt processing of requests for certification, and some do not. It is not uncommon for our offices to hear of long waits for certification letters, delaying a victim's ability to apply for relief.

Senate Bill 962A will ensure consistent protocols for law enforcement agencies across the state, streamlining the certification standards and processing times. Implementation of the new standards will deliver a message to survivors that there is help available to them, and their immigration status should not deter them from seeking safety. The bill will remove a tool of manipulation and abuse from the hands of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking perpetrators.

Senate Bill 962A is the product of extensive work by myriad stakeholders, led by the chief sponsor of the bill, Senator Kathleen Taylor and her staff, Amanda Kraus. Our thanks to the sponsors of this bill and the stakeholders for the good work crafting a consensus bill to help vulnerable survivors and increase public safety.

For all of the above reasons, we urge your support.

Sincerely,

Sybil Hebb

Director of Legislative Advocacy

Oregon Law Center