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March 29, 2021

Joint Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chair Beyer, Co-Chair Gomberg, and Members of the Committee

I write to you today on behalf of Clackamas Women's Services (CWS) in support of HB 5011, and the recommended budget for the Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) Department for the 2021-2023 biennium.

The mission of Clackamas Women's Services (CWS) is to break the isolation of domestic and sexual violence. Incorporated in 1985 as Clackamas County's first domestic violence shelter, CWS is one of the most comprehensive community-based organizations in the state providing services to survivors of domestic/dating violence, sexual assault, elder and vulnerable adult abuse, human trafficking and exploitation, and stalking. The wide-ranging slate of services provided by CWS includes emergency shelter, transitional housing, a 24/7 crisis line, mobile advocacy, mental health counseling, support groups, legal advocacy, youth violence prevention education, Camp HOPE Oregon, and community education. At our secure emergency shelter, rural outreach offices, Clackamas Community College, DHS, Camp HOPE Oregon, and A Safe Place Family Justice Center (ASP-FJC), CWS coordinates services with other public and private agencies in order to best serve survivors seeking help.

A safe and stable place to call home is a basic human need.

As you know, the State of Oregon has been hit hard by a number of crises in 2020. The ongoing pandemic and summer wildfires have devastated communities across the state and thrown families into economic distress. Prior to 2020, Oregon was already experiencing a housing crisis, and too many of our neighbors and community members were experiencing housing instability. In times of crisis like the ones that we experienced last year, and the one we are continuing to experience, a strong response to aid those who are most impacted is critical.

According to the ACLU and other sources, domestic violence is the third leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Violence is also a significant public health issue that affects all aspects of an individual's well-being. Oregon has one of the highest rates of domestic and sexual violence in the nation, making the connection between domestic violence, homelessness, and health a significant public concern. According to the Oregon Women's Foundation's 2016 Count Her In Report, approximately 1 million women and girls will be affected by domestic or sexual violence in their lifetime.

Safe and stable housing, along with access to supportive networks, are fundamental elements that influence social determinants of health. For individuals and families displaced by domestic and sexual violence, the possibility of housing insecurity, and even homelessness, often looms large. In their escape from their abusers, victims are often cut off from the resources that support daily living. Leaving them with nothing more than the clothes on their back and their children in tow, victims can be overwhelmed and isolated by fear and uncertainty. Circumstances can be even direr for victims from marginalized populations and communities experiencing oppression.

Numerous studies have also shown that victims faced with economic barriers experience domestic violence at higher rates because they have fewer resources to attain safe and stable housing. In a study conducted by the National Alliance to End Family Homelessness, 46% of homeless women report having stayed in an abusive relationship because they did not have a safe alternative. National Network to End Domestic Violence tracks housing support as the most requested service requested by victims displaced by domestic violence. Research finds that victims who secure safe and stable housing experience a reduction in re-victimization rates.

Throughout the years, Clackamas Women's Services (CWS) has worked with OHCS to implement and administer various programs including SHAP and EHA funded emergency shelter, eviction prevention and rent assistance. **These programs have served hundreds of survivors and their children annually.**

Issues of housing insecurity are a growing concern in Oregon for all populations. We appreciate your consideration of this critical that supports the safety and stability of those made vulnerable by domestic and sexual violence. Your investment will have a profound impact on the lives of survivors in our community.

We strongly support the passage of HB 5011 so that organizations like ours can continue to partner with OHCS and work to serve the people of Oregon.

Thank you for your time and for your service to the State of Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Melissa Erlbaum". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light blue background.

Melissa Erlbaum

Executive Director