



Support for SB 497

Senate Judiciary Chairman Floyd Prozanski, and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary, I am Dr. Marci Nelson and I am providing testimony in support of SB 497 on behalf of Washington County Community Corrections and the Oregon Association of Community Corrections Directors (OACCD).

For nearly 14 years, I have managed my department's Counseling and Victims' Services program and have served many survivors of domestic violence (DV), children, and perpetrators as well. Further, I have provided countless hours of clinical supervision to therapists and advocates who also worked closely with DV victims, families, and justice-involved individuals (JIIs).

My experience has given me an in-depth understanding of DV and its effects on victims, children, and the broader community. I have also witnessed firsthand how the community supervision of domestic violence is a crucial factor in stopping abusive individuals from reoffending and perpetuating this tragic cycle within families and against other citizens.

Unfortunately, most DV crimes are charged as misdemeanors, not felonies. This may be the result of a long cultural history of downplaying violence against intimate partners, particularly violence against women. However, in reality the perpetuation of domestic violence is devastating, often lethal, and causes a great deal of suffering. Abusive partners violate the basic human rights of their victims and they use terror to maintain power and control over their families.

Further, those who perpetrate domestic violence pose a much higher risk to the community than most other criminal profiles. Many mass shootings at family gatherings, workplaces and public settings often involve those who are also DV perpetrators. Abusers gravely harm their intimate partners, but they often attack others as well, even family pets. They pose a significant threat to children and the general public. This is why many community corrections agencies strive to supervise DV JIIs, even if their convictions are misdemeanors, and even if funding is meager.

Despite the elevated community risk, the state currently does not fund DV misdemeanors. This leaves community corrections agencies scrambling to fund supervision of DV crimes or simply being unable to do it at all.

DV supervision is important. It means there is a PO available to ensure the DV JII is following their court orders, abstaining from offensive contact with victims, paying restitution, managing alcohol and drug addiction, and attending a batterer intervention program. DV Probation Officers (PO's) work closely with JIIs to apply proven strategies that change behavior and prevent future

harm. DV is an incredibly challenging behavior to change and it takes specialists who stay on top of it and focus entirely on effective strategies.

But what many people don't know, is that a DV PO also works closely with DV victims. The most dangerous time for a DV victim is when they are leaving the relationship, so they need extra support for their safety. A DV PO is available to victims for questions about what's happening; helping them understand the complexity of the criminal justice system. When no-contact and protective orders are in place, a PO often coordinates strategies to ensure victims and children receive financial support and child support; including payment of utility bills, house payments, and other financial obligations so that the JII is not allowed to financially abuse their families.

A PO also provides safety planning, they warn of any potential dangers, they connect victims to community services, and provide a trauma-informed presence that is vital to empowering victims to escape abuse. A DV PO must be a specialist in working with crime victims and the work they do must be valued and adequately funded. A DV PO also works with potential victims; connecting with JIIs' new romantic partners to inform them about the risks and history so that they can make informed decisions and reach out if needed.

Beyond probation officers, community corrections departments often employ victim advocates who work closely with victims and the PO to assist victims in safety planning, connect them to resources, provide DV education, and ensure victims have a warm supportive confidant to rely on in their darkest times. Further, community corrections agencies are mandated by state law to ensure that batterer intervention programs adhere to legal requirements for their programming and provide evidence-based intervention. Therefore, resources must also be devoted to program reviews and provider development, in order for community corrections agencies to comply with state laws. Effective DV mitigation requires adequate funding.

To iterate, most DV crimes are misdemeanors but that doesn't mean they aren't dangerous, devastating, and disruptive to victims, children, pets and the general public. In fact, within community corrections, we acknowledge that those who commit DV crimes pose the greatest danger to us all, and the supervision of domestic violence crimes is vital to public safety. I hope you support SB 497 and ensure stable funding for the supervision of all DV crimes.

We look forward to continuing our collaborative participation with the state in determining the next steps relating to a statewide supervision and services strategy to end domestic violence.

Thank you for your consideration.

Marci Nelson, PhD
Program Manager
Washington County Community Corrections