

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and members of the committee,

Re: Yes on SB 271-1

I am Michele White, Executive Director of the Sexual Assault Resource Center in Washington County. Thank you for taking up SB 271-1. I strongly support this bill, which is essential for the stability and wellbeing of the victims and survivors we serve.

For over 40 years, SARC's dedicated staff and volunteers have been providing crisis intervention and ongoing support services to folks who have been impacted by sexual violence. Crisis intervention, including phone support and in-person response, is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We also offer housing support, case management and counseling for survivors and their families.

SB 271-1 will continue and increase funding to community-based and culturally specific DVSA programs to assist survivors with housing needs, and fund prevention services to support survivors at risk of becoming unhoused due to DVSA.

Passage of SB 271-1 would allow domestic and sexual violence programs across the state to continue to address both the imminent danger of violence and the often-imminent threat of becoming unhoused. In 2019, both the Oregon Alliance to End Violence Against Women and the National Network to End Domestic Violence found housing stability to be the greatest issue and unmet need facing survivors in Oregon.

- With the constraints of pandemic restrictions, programs have had to utilize motel stays as safe shelters more than ever before. Without funding to maintain this type of sheltering, advocates are forced to turn survivors away from emergency shelter. Emergency shelter is a crucial step in ending both the cycle of violence and the potential cycle of being unhoused while also trying to stay safe from an abuser.

- Passage of SB 271-1 would allow for community-based domestic violence programs to continue and grow capacity to serve survivors who are facing housing instability. Programs would be able to offer individualized assistance for those who may need to move to be safe, or who need help with landlord negotiations and housing searches, application processes, and tenant education.

- The effects of housing instability go beyond the need for temporary, emergency shelter: housing instability affects social determinants of health such economic stability, access to education, and even access to quality healthcare. According to the CDC, homelessness is connected to negative impacts on physical and mental health, including substance abuse and mental illness. These outcomes for those who are unhoused are compounded by lack of access to care and limited resources.

As the growing housing crisis continues in our state, we are grateful to the lawmakers who are prioritizing the health and safety of victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence with this legislation. We urge you to pass SB 271-1.

Thank you for your work.

Michele White, MSW
Executive Director
Sexual Assault Resource Center