



Dear Co-Chairs Sollman and Evans, and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety,

Re: \$16 Million in the Department of Justice Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division Budget (SB 5514) for:

- *\$10 Million to the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund (HB 2933) for confidential safety and support services*
- *\$6 Million to the Survivor Housing Fund (HB 3018) for housing assistance for survivors*

On behalf of Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS), I am pleased to submit testimony in support of funding in the Department of Justice Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division Budget (SB 5514) of \$10 million to the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services (ODSVS) Fund for confidential safety planning and support services for survivors and \$6 million to the Survivor Housing Fund (SHF) for housing assistance for survivors. During the pandemic, the State of Oregon recognized how urgently needed these funds were and allocated this lifesaving one-time funding. But the need hasn't waned as the pandemic has and what was true then remains true now: survivors of violence in our state need and deserve the critical supports funded by ODSVS and Survivor Housing Funds. In honor of the survivors we serve, we seek continuation of these programs as on-going and stable services.

As one of only two agencies in Oregon that exclusively address sexual violence, SASS support a unique group of survivors and families. Since 1991, SASS has provided support to survivors of sexual violence as well as their families, children, partners, and friends. We are proud to be a resource for the Lane County community, for people throughout Oregon, and, indeed, all over the world. In 2022, we served over 1300 survivors through our 24/7 Crisis and Support Line, our 24/7 emergency medical advocacy, our English- and Spanish-language support groups and workshops, and more.

ODSVS and Survivor Housing Funds are each essential funding sources for us and help ensure that we're able to offer survivors access to confidential, culturally-specific, and trauma-informed support and assistance as they seek safety and healing.

\$10 Million to Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund (ODSVS) in the CVSSD Budget (This funding is also requested in a bipartisan stand-alone bill, HB 2933)

The Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund (ODSVS) distributes funds to more than 60 community-based, culturally specific and Tribal programs across the state of Oregon to provide confidential trauma-informed services for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and human trafficking. As one of these providers, SASS offers comprehensive support across the spectrum of need. For those in the acute aftermath of violence, we provide 24/7 emergency medical advocacy, legal support, safety-planning, transitional housing support, trafficking intervention, and crisis support. For people who are living in the wake of violence, our support groups and educational workshops help

people grow throughout their healing journey. And as we work towards a future in which there is no sexual violence, SASS leads prevention education and training for youth, parents, professionals, and the broader community. We provide all of these services in English and Spanish, as well as other languages via interpreter, and to survivors of all ages, backgrounds, and genders. ODSVS funds make it possible for us to continually rise to meet the needs of our community.

As a community-based DVSA provider, ODSVS funds have been critical to ensuring the stability of our agency. These funds have allowed us to build strong, robust, and resilient advocacy staff who are able to provide the best and most comprehensive care to the survivors we work with. Across our industry, low wages and lack of stable funding create precarity for the frontline workers who perform the hardest and highest-trauma work. Even before the pandemic, advocates were often stretched thin. Since the pandemic began, we've seen caseloads increasing, needs becoming more complex, and community resources overburdened. ODSVS has made it possible for our agency to provide our advocates with the job stability and support that they need to continue to do this work. Ensuring that we can pay a living wage, offer comprehensive health insurance, adapt to new working conditions, and respond holistically to the needs of our staff is essential to the stability of our organization. Because of ODSVS, we have been able to not only retain staff but to also grow in response to community demand instead of losing advocates and leaving months-long gaps in critical infrastructure as positions go unfilled.

ODSVS is the only state general fund source of support for these critical services. The need for these supportive services continues to grow and the burden of essential service provision is challenged by staffing shortages, lack of funding, and other obstacles. We are in support of investing \$10 million for the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund to help programs across the state continue to provide necessary and lifesaving services.

\$6 Million in Oregon Survivor Housing Fund (SHF) in the CVSSD Budget (This funding is also requested in a bipartisan stand-alone bill, HB 3018)

The Oregon Survivor Housing Fund (SHF) distributes funds to more than 60 community-based, culturally specific and Tribal programs across the state of Oregon to facilitate access to safe and stable housing for victims and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and human trafficking.

As one such agency, SASS sees the effects of Oregon's housing crisis firsthand. One of our highest-need areas is housing, which is why the Survivor Housing Funds are so critical. Nationwide data shows that rates of sexual violence amongst those who are unhoused/housing insecure are astronomical. We see this reflected locally; in 2022, about 13% of those we worked with were experiencing literal houselessness, and that number doesn't account for the many who were housing insecure or housed in unsafe spaces. For these survivors, access to direct financial support through Survivor Housing Funds may mean the difference between staying with an abuser and getting free. Additionally, these funds make it possible to staff positions that provide the trauma-informed support that survivors need to navigate the process of getting housed and becoming financially stable; these staffers help with the housing search, teach survivors how to understand their legal rights as tenants, facilitate the process of applying for housing, connect survivors to financial education, and more. Yet the need for continues to outpace capacity.

Oregon Survivor Housing Funds (SHF) have been instrumental in supporting survivors and their families in finding safe and permanent housing in the midst of a statewide housing shortage,

rise in rent costs, and current inflation. Because of these funds, SASS has not only been able to pay rent for survivors but also to support those survivors to remove barriers and become more stable for the long term. Paying expenses such as moving costs, application fees, security deposits, and utilities allows survivors to start strong in their new housing situation. By paying off outstanding debt, which has often been caused by abusers, survivors are able to repair their credit. And by offering trauma-informed education and support, survivors become more financial resilient, which prevents further victimization and decreases the amount of resources they will need in the future. These critical and flexible funds help survivors begin this new stage in their lives on solid footing.

We support an investment of \$6 million in Oregon Survivor Housing Funds to end housing instability for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, stalking and human trafficking.

In closing, \$16 million in long-term stable funding for ODSVS (\$10 million) and SHF (\$6 million) funding, administered by DOJ's Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division (CVSSD), will provide programs with the resources to further develop capacity and build a statewide infrastructure designed for sustainability and equity in meeting the needs of survivors. Continuation of this one-time funding is necessary to stabilize programs, meet the rising need for safety services, and offer wages designed to recruit and retain skilled workers and administrators.

For the above reasons, we hope you will support an ongoing investment of a \$10 million increase in ODSVS funds and a continuation of \$6 million in Survivor Housing Funds in the CVSSD Budget. Full funding of these services is essential to support crime victims and survivors in Oregon and the organizations and providers who serve them. Thank you for your consideration and for the opportunity to testify.

In solidarity,

Martina Shabram, PhD
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Sexual Assault Support Services of Lane County