



Oregon Coalition

Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

MEASURE: HB 2903
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SUBMITTED BY: Vanessa Timmons

Monday, March 25, 2013

House Committee on Business & Labor
Attention: Chair Margaret Doherty
CC: Members of the Committee
RE: Written Testimony in **Support of More Safe Leave** in the workplace (HB 2903)

The Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence advocates for the 50+ community-based, non-profit shelters, crisis lines and safety service centers that support victims of domestic and sexual violence. We provide these programs across the state of Oregon with technical assistance, trainings, resources and advocacy. *We strive to give hard earned support to those in and around your district who are doing the critical work of assisting your constituents through their most frightening experiences.*

In turn, these programs from throughout Oregon - including Tribal Communities - provide the legal, medical and personal advocacy needed to help victims of domestic and sexual violence to become survivors. As Executive Director of the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence, I am writing today to draw attention to the impact that domestic and sexual violence have on the health of our workplaces and communities. Thank you each for your work on and consideration of HB 2903, and for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Domestic and sexual violence are serious public health issues that impact Oregon families and children in profound ways. For instance, in Portland, domestic violence currently accounts for nearly ½ of simple assaults and 1/3 of aggravated assaults (PPB). This violence contributes to severe injuries, mental and physical health problems, disabilities and death to Oregon women (Oregon Violence Against Women Prevention Plan). In fact, domestic violence contributes to a larger % of homicides in Oregon compared to other parts of the country (25% in Oregon vs. 17% nationally) – and more recently, in 2010, DV contributed to 1 in 3 homicides statewide.

Domestic and sexual violence do not stay at home when their victims go to work. A recent survey of Oregon victims revealed that 69% were employed at the time they were suffering abuse (Glass, et al., 2010). This means an impact for both the employee and the employer. Businesses pay a high price employees who are victims cannot access help. The annual cost to businesses of lost productivity due to domestic violence is estimated at \$900 million, and in Oregon, include approximately \$9.3 million in lost productivity from paid work for victims of nonfatal intimate partner violence (Oregon Department of Humans Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Epidemiology).

Oregon is already in many ways is a shining example of commitment to providing a coordinated community response to help victims become survivors. An expanded - and better publicized - safe leave program only helps to further this goal by helping victims in our community survive violence, protect their children, stay in their homes and their jobs.

HB 2903 CAN HELP SURVIVORS ACHIEVE SAFETY:

- **It is essential that survivors are able to take safety steps right away, when necessary to prevent further abuse.**
 - Survivors of domestic violence are at an increased risk of harm shortly after separation from an abusive partner. At the same time, it is essential that victims preserve their economic security. Economic independence is a primary indicator of whether a victim will be able to maintain safety from abuse.
 - Sabotage of employment is a strategy by the abusive partner to control and potentially escalate the violence with serious negative consequences for health and safety (McFarlane et al., 2003).

- **Victims of domestic violence often stay with their abuser because they are financially dependent on that person.**
 - Without access to leave, victims are in an untenable catch-22. They need economic security and safety assistance, yet are unable to access safety without suffering job sanctions.

It is in the public interest to reduce domestic and sexual violence by enabling victims to seek safety and redress the effects of violence without jeopardizing their jobs. HB 2903 bolsters these important safeguards to ensure that it works well for employers as well as for employees. **We urge you to support HB 2903.** Thank you for your leadership and work, and please do not hesitate to contact us if you feel we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Timmons, Executive Director
Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence