



Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force

**Testimony in support of SB 1571
Senate Committee on Judiciary
Submitted by: Michele Roland-Schwartz, Executive Director**

February 2, 2016

Chair Prozanski and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Michele Roland-Schwartz, Executive Director of the Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force. The Sexual Assault Task Force is a private, non-profit, non-governmental statewide agency with over 100 multi-disciplinary members who serve as advisors on 1 of 8 subcommittees including: Campus, Criminal Justice, Legislative & Public Policy, Medical-Forensic, Men's Engagement, Offender Management, Prevention Education, and Victim Response.

Our mission is to facilitate and support a collaborative, survivor-centered approach to the prevention of and response to sexual violence. We accomplish our mission by providing multi-disciplinary training and technical assistance to sexual assault responders in Oregon and nationally.

I submit this testimony in support of SB 1571 (Melissa's Law). This bill signifies Oregon's long-term commitment to prevent future SAFE Kit backlogs and encourages us to re-think our approaches to serving victims of sexual assault. It is integral to restore survivors' trust in our system's response following sexual assault.

Receiving a medical-forensic exam is a critical access point to healthcare services that help reduce the negative mental and physical health consequences victims of sexual assault may experience long-term. The exam itself is a long process, taking hours to complete by a specially trained Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SAE/SANE) who conducts a thorough medical assessment and collects evidence. Victims are often trepidatious about accessing services and disclosing their sexual assault to anyone. When they do disclose their assault, they put an enormous amount of trust in our system. We must meet their courage to come forward with action - Melissa's Law is one of many steps we can take to show our action.

Melissa's Law is aligned with the Sexual Assault Task Force's ongoing efforts to inform Oregon's practices related to the provision of medical-forensic exams and the timely processing of SAFE Kits, and is one piece of a larger puzzle. Our efforts include:

- Developed *Survivor Notification Recommendations*, informed by national best practice and reflecting our local conditions. The recommendations are an important reminder that we need a trauma-informed approach in how we re-engage victims (many of whom feel forgotten) in the system after we process the backlog of untested kits.
- Offer training on trauma-informed approaches to investigation, prosecution, and advocacy to Oregon responders.
- Co-host a *Joyful Heart Foundation* training with the *Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence*, focusing on how we provide ongoing advocacy support and services to survivors whose kits were part of the backlog.
- Provide an infrastructure whereby trauma-informed and survivor-centered best and promising practices, as well as policy recommendations are developed and influenced.

Thank you for your ongoing work to address sexual assault in Oregon, and for taking action by introducing Melissa's Law. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this bill, and am available for any additional questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,



Michele Roland-Schwartz
Executive Director