

March 29, 2021

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the Committee, my name is Denise Pena and I am a Senior Manager at the Dept of Community Justice in Multnomah County . I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 497.

I have worked in the field of Domestic Violence for 25 years in different roles. These include working as a community based advocate working at a shelter for women and children, a program based advocate in the District Attorney's office, a parole/probation officer (PO) supervising batterer's and starting the Victim's Services Unit at the Department of Community Justice. I now work as senior manager and am also the liaison for the Family Violence Supervision Network (FVSN) for OACCD. FVSN is a group of dedicated PPOs from around the state that meet and collaborate on a quarterly basis to discuss issues surrounding supervision of domestic violence cases.

The role of a PO supervising domestic violence offenders is a very unique one. Not only do you work with the offender to help change his behavior, you also work with his victim just as closely.

A lot of my work when I was the manager of the Victim's Services Unit was focused on ensuring that victim's rights post-conviction were honored. But it's the victim of the crime of conviction, or instant offense, that has legal rights afforded to them. In the world of domestic violence, there are other victims that are impacted but do not have legal rights but still need and deserve support.

A DV victim can touch many different points of the criminal justice system. They interact with law enforcement who responds to the incident and the prosecutor who moves the criminal case through the court system.

A victim will spend more time in the post-conviction phase when the offender is sentenced to community supervision. That is where the supervision and services provided by Community Corrections comes in. As a Domestic Violence PO, I would reach out to the victim of crime that resulted in community supervision. I would answer questions regarding a very confusing post conviction system and make referrals to victim services as needed.

Probation officers supervising domestic violence cases develop a relationship with the victim as well as the offender. POs assist with safety planning, offer support and respond directly when a victim is in danger or being threatened. This is where survivors can see the criminal justice system holding their offender accountable.

It was not uncommon for one of the clients that I was supervising to inform me they had a new girlfriend. The unfortunate reality is that the new girlfriend could be at risk for being the next victim. As a PO, I would make contact with the new girlfriend to begin to develop a rapport and be as available to her as much as I was with the victim of the instant offense.

Domestic violence doesn't happen by chance or because someone loses control. In fact, it's the opposite- it's about power and control. Additionally, most domestic violence acts are misdemeanors or started as misdemeanors.

As a result of current funding, community corrections may not be available as a resource to victims and batterer's in all counties for the misdemeanant population. Supervision of felony DV cases will usually include contact restrictions that can be modified by the PO and Domestic Violence Intervention Counseling. These conditions are typically the same for misdemeanor supervision (in the Counties that currently supervise those cases). DV is not one isolated incident. It escalates over time and community corrections play a vital role with interventions to target those values and beliefs of the perpetrator as well as helping keep victims safe.

Thank you for your time and consideration for this important bill that will impact survivors all over our state.

Denise