

Good afternoon Co-chairs and Members of the Ways and Means committee, my name is Jennifer Sims. I am an advocate and the Housing Program Coordinator at Domestic Violence Services in Morrow and Umatilla Counties. Domestic Violence Services, INC. provides critical services to victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence. I am here today to ask for your support of the Oregon Domestic & Sexual Violence Services fund and Housing Navigator Fund for survivors in Oregon.

These funds make it possible for advocates to assist survivors in our community. Without this funding, we would not have been able to provide housing, utility, employment, and childcare supports to over 80 survivors from our rural communities in the last year, and during a pandemic when individuals have been experiencing extreme hardship and ongoing abuse. Individuals from incredibly high-risk populations such as those in homeless shelters, DV shelters, and inpatient/outpatient substance misuse treatment facilities have been among the highest concentration of service. We would not have been able to provide ongoing life skills courses, support groups, as well as secondary financial assistance for survivor housing. Resulting in long-term housing stability.

The funds received have allowed us to build stronger alliances and connections with other service agencies both locally as well as statewide allowing us to reach more people and provide a broader spectrum of services and referrals. The funds in question today have assisted many families in our rural area with obtaining and maintaining stable housing. Some of these families and individuals have been able to get their very first single-family home. And have the esteem to maintain that self-sufficiency.

As a survivor of domestic violence and sexual assault myself, I can honestly say that if services related to housing would have been available to me, myself and my children would not have been subject to the abuse and mistreatment for as long as we were. These programs change lives and forge a new path for the individuals and families affected by violence.

I would also ask that you consider continuing your support of ongoing funding and supports for housing, domestic violence services, and substance misuse. Without the funding in those areas, I would not be the person I am today and would not have been able to rebuild and sustain a future for myself or my children.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and for making a difference for survivors of violence and your service to the beautiful state of Oregon.