



Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force

**House Committee on Human Services
Testimony in Support of HB2826
February 10, 2021**

Chair Williams, Vice Chairs Leif and Ruiz, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force (SATF), we are pleased to submit testimony in support of HB2826.

Our mission is to advance a multi-disciplinary, survivor-centered approach to the prevention of and response to sexual violence in Oregon. Our goal is to prevent sexual violence from happening in the first place, while simultaneously improving our response efforts to mitigate trauma and ensure the safety and security of all victims.

SATF is firm in our stance that sexual violence, child abuse and all other forms of violence and abuse are connected. We urge support for HB 2826 and increasing funding for Child Advocacy Centers (CAC). CACs provide critical services to youth and families experiencing abuse, neglect, and violence. CACs ensure that young people have a safe place to disclose experiences of abuse, neglect, and violence, enabling staff to properly diagnose and offer treatment services so that they may heal and access safety.

There are over 20 CACs across the state, serving all 36 counties by providing services like medical exams and forensic interviews—as well as prevention services and follow up family services and mental health treatment for youth who present with concerns of abuse. CACs work in close collaboration with law enforcement, DHS, district attorneys, schools and other community partners during child abuse assessments and investigations, both to be cost-effective and because this model has shown improved outcomes for children.

When young people cannot access a CAC, the likelihood of misdiagnoses is higher, which can result in youth remaining in unsafe situations or being removed from their homes unnecessarily. Lack of access to CACs may also result in additional trauma as a result of youth receiving services in police stations and emergency rooms, rather than a child-friendly setting designed specifically for them. We know this impact is a greater concern for youth of color and those from communities with historically traumatic experiences with response systems.

COVID-19 has added significant stressors. The closure of schools has impacted community ability to intervene early, which means that by the time a report is made and a young person is seen at their local CAC, their abuse experiences may be more complex, repeated, and/or severe. It is also much more expensive for CACs to provide care in a manner that is COVID-19 safe. To add additional challenges for CACs, community fundraising has decreased —and now federal Victims of Crime Act funding is slated to decrease over the next biennium as well.

Advocates working in the field of child abuse have agreed that the risk for abuse is much higher during periods of economic instability, stress, and isolation. Oregon's CACs must be prepared to address, assess, and treat youth who have been victimized during this pandemic. The current gap in services is unacceptable.

We must ensure that child welfare, and the community agencies that support child wellbeing, have what is needed to intervene and keep kids safe. Investing \$6 million in Child Advocacy Centers is urgent and necessary to accomplish these critical goals. Young people in Oregon have earned the right to be served by a CAC specialist following their experiences of abuse and neglect. More than that – young people deserve an investment in a future without violence and abuse, which is why we are proud to support this bill and urge your support of HB2826.

Sincerely,



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