



Supporting Survivors • Strengthening Communities • Empowering Change

April 24th, 2021

Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chairs Johnson, Steiner-Hayward, Rayfield, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for taking time out of your Saturday to hear our testimonies. My name is Amber Wishoff. I am coming before you to represent the **voices of survivors** experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking on the Oregon Coast and implore you to support for a \$10 million increase in funding for the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services fund (ODSVS) within the Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division of the Department of Justice.

The ODSVS fund is the **only** General Fund source of dollars for **confidential shelter, support, and safety planning services for survivors and their children**. ODSVS is the fund that provides **stability to keep the doors open** at the confidential emergency shelters, run and staff the 24-hour hotlines, and maintain advocacy services. These dollars go to culturally specific programs, Oregon Tribes, and community-based domestic and sexual violence programs, and serve survivors in **every corner of our state**.

For the last 10 years I have worked with trauma survivors as well as people experiencing homelessness in Tillamook and Lincoln county as a volunteer and advocate. In that time, I have had the honor of offering specialized support in housing, court and DHS systems, and therapeutic art, to domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual assault survivors. I now continue that work as the executive director of My Sisters Place, also known as My Safe Place (MSP) in Lincoln County. I relay this, to give context when I say, that I have **NEVER** seen the **level of complex trauma** as we have in the last year.

Each situation is uniquely multifaceted. We must take a comprehensive, culturally-responsive, trauma-informed approach in partnering with the survivors to meet their, and often their children's needs on the **path to safety**. This is the work MSP has done for over forty-one years in this community but with the pandemic and the Echo Mountain Fires, the concept of safety has changed drastically.

Our agency, like others across the state, saw an **exponential growth in calls to hotlines and requests for safe, emergency shelter and services**. In the last year we took over one thousand calls on our "Hopeline," a 24-hour crisis hotline that we operate in partnership with our sister program and MOU partner, The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians CARE Program. This was a massive increase over what we have seen in years past. The ongoing crises of 2020-2021 have made access to resources and stable housing even more difficult for those who are in abusive and oppressive situations. We have all been asked to stay at home for community health and safety but for some, that was an even more concerning task because **home wasn't a safe place**.



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The fires made obtaining safety an even more complicated matter. Our shelter has taken the precautions necessary to remain at full capacity throughout the pandemic so when the **Echo Mountain Fire forced us to evacuate our shelter**, it was no small undertaking to help our clients and their children pack their belongings on a moment's notice. As we left, we didn't know if we'd have a place for these already displaced people, to return to. We were fortunate to be able to return to minor damage. The fires have complicated the progress for many survivors in and out of our shelter as they transition to safety. Housing options are even more limited as now there is less than 1% new rental availability in our county.

The fires were just one part of the challenges in the last year. Across all communities, we are seeing that the needs are great, and the options are few. Especially for underserved and marginalized communities. The **ODSVS funding has been essential** in helping us fully meet the unique needs as they arise. **Survivor Housing funds** have provided emergency assistance to **survivors at imminent risk** of homelessness or unstably or unsafely housed. It makes all the difference, especially in rural communities with limited resources like ours. COVID has cast a long shadow. For people already experiencing hardship, barriers, and oppression, this pandemic has **turned those dark places even darker**. There is no magic wand or catch-all answer to many of the problems facing us. However, when we see needs with plausible solutions, **we CAN make progress**. *Your support would be the spark that helps us illuminate those dark unknowns.* Please support ODSVS and Survivor Housing funds to **your greatest capacity**, to ensure that **survivors in your communities** have access to emergency shelter, expert safety-planning, housing stability, and wrap-around support services. These services help victims identify and explore real options to escape violence. **These services save lives.**

Thank you very much for your service to the State of Oregon, your consideration, and anything you can do to help **bring light to this situation.**

Sincerely,

Amber Wishoff
Executive Director
My Sisters' Place
amberw@mysistersplace.us