

Testimony of Erin Vance in Support of SB 193

House Committee on Rules, May 25th, 2021.

Chair Smith Warner and Members of the Committee,

My name is Erin Vance and I live in the Dalles. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to come address you on an issue very close to my heart - that of restoring justice for those who have been seriously harmed due to the negligence or abuse of another.

I am here today to talk about this issue for personal reasons; On December 30, 2010, I was a victim of sexual assault by an anesthesiologist at Mid-Columbia Medical Center in The Dalles while I was under for a minor surgery. To be specific, I have memories of him using my hand to touch himself and waking up to being kissed on the lips while coming out of sedation. This abuse has had major impacts on me, including a diagnosis of PTSD, continued fear to even visit my regular doctor and panic at the thought of going back to the hospital. Like so many other survivors, I struggled with a debilitating sense of shame and embarrassment – I experienced physical symptoms as well, including nausea and panic, with the questions “How could this happen? Why?” on constant replay in my mind.

I was horrified to later learn that this type of abuse had already happened to at least 11 different women before me, and at least 18 who came forward. At least eleven other women who were forever impacted, just like me. Through a series of legal investigations, lawyers were able to put together a horrific pattern of sexual abuse that had been going on for years, which involved cover-ups and denials by the hospital administration and staff members. The doctor was finally arrested in late July 2011.

I am so proud that my case and the cases of other brave survivors brought about institutional change within the medical center to focus on patient safety. Only through the legal system were I and some of the survivors able to seek justice and meaningful change after going through unspeakable abuse. Medical care facilities are institutions serving the most vulnerable at their most critical moments. A cap is a great insult and injustice to survivors when those institutions knowingly allow for systemic abuse.

I ask that all of you will take it upon yourself to restore justice for survivors by holding wrongdoers and abusers accountable. Please vote Yes on Senate Bill 193.