



*Where violence ends  
and hope begins...*

### **Mission**

The Harbor provides advocacy, prevention, and support to promote self-determination and hope for survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking.

### **Board of Directors**

Kelly Peekstok - *Chair*  
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harbornw.org

January 27, 2023

Co-Chair Steiner and Co-Chair Sanchez, and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Co-Chair Sollman and Co-Chair Evans and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety

My name is Paola Velazquez and I am a Bilingual/Bicultural direct service advocate, housing navigator, and family engagement coordinator at The Harbor, in Astoria, OR. We are a non-profit agency that work with domestic abuse, sexual assault, and stalking survivors who are at risk. Our agency not only provides direct service work like emotional support, emergency services/shelter, and housing navigation, but also provide educational material throughout our county as prevention work within the schools, job corps, and other co-located locations. This letter addresses my support of House Bill 3018, and its \$5,000,000 to support survivor housing needs. As the housing navigator, I testify to the importance of these funds for our agency to be able to provide the necessary support for our clients to maintain, secure, and find housing stability with these stable housing funds. Especially with our housing crisis, that I am sure not only withstands in Clatsop but across the state.

After a few months of only working as a direct service advocate, I was given the role of becoming the housing navigator for not just our agency's clients, but also for clients who called from Columbia and Tillamook County. I see the despair many families face as they try to look for a safe place to settle down and call home. Throughout my work I see the many different barriers that still exist within our systems. Being bicultural, I also recognize the gaps for my people who have a harder time identifying resources that are intersectional and trauma informed. With the passage of the HB 3018, you allow us to make this bridge for many individuals, including for the Latinx survivors, to reach or stay in stable housing that is safe.

One specific family who took benefit from these funds was a mother and daughter who are immigrants from a Central American country. These clients reached out to our Latine/x team since they knew of us through the community. Although the daughter had already received our services, through The Harbor's prevention team at a Job Corps institution in Clatsop. The client identified housing assistance as their immediate need. They had gotten an eviction notice due to her not being able to work to take care of her daughter. The daughter was the primary victim of SA, and the mom was the secondary victim. Due to their legal status the resources from the community were limited, but we were able to help them through the SHF. The daughter was experiencing PTSD that showed up as convulsions on and off but had recently started to get longer and worse. This meant the mother had to take some time off from work and stay at home to take care of her daughter. The survivor had insurance but unfortunately it would not cover all the medical expenses that were adding up due to treatments, exams, and tests. We provided support around navigating the hospital's financial assistance program. Since the mom had stopped working and did not have any PTO benefits that the job offered, her landlord had given an eviction notice due to no payment. This is when we introduced education on their tenant's rights due to the assault and filled out a FHCO referral form for future use. Thankfully, after the landlord knew more about what had happened, the referral form was not used. An application for the Survivor Housing Funds



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was filled out in order to provide financial assistance in paying the month's due rent and any late charges. The application then was approved for a little more than \$1,500. Although the survivor housing funds were not able to accommodate all their financial needs, they provided some breathing space as she looked for other resources/went back to work. It allowed the family to focus on credit card payments that were also due (the credit cards were obtained to cover expenses while the mother stopped working), and it allowed them to also not lose access to their transportation.

Barriers that we faced were bigger system setbacks. As mentioned before, one of the setbacks we faced was how the insurance that the survivor had, did not want to cover all medical expenses when it was directly related to the assault she experienced. It was frustrating for both ends to see the many gaps our society's system has for survivor's who are undocumented immigrants, and/or enrolled in the job corps. There was a lot of uncertainty during this time for this family because of the laws/acts, that the site where she studies enforced/protected them due to their confidentiality policies. This created a bigger unease and lacked trauma-informed services for the family.

With the SHF, The Harbor was able to provide a little comfort in letting them know that there is support for them. It gave them security, knowing that at least they were able to stay in their home while everything else worked itself out with the systems. The flexibility we can provide with the SHF, not requiring many documents, and it being open to all survivors even those without an SSN, relieves many survivors and provides the sustainability piece they need to keep on moving forward with what they are enduring in their time of trauma. Another win we had with this client was how our bilingual staff bridged the language barrier gap. Our team was also able to build the trust of our clients due to us being bicultural, and being aware of the many fears clients have, interacting with any system/agency. I say team because I did not work with client alone, but there were three bilingual staff members that provided support in the front end, not counting those who manage the SHF process behind the scenes.

The passage of HB 3018 is crucial for families who experience domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking especially if they have been victims of financial control. Our agency does its part in offering the necessary wrap-around services for the survivor, like providing financial education or knowing how to navigate the systems they might not be familiar with. On that note, we need the funding to continue to offer financial help; we need the funding to provide intersectional and trauma-informed work; we need the funding to support survivors into safe, secure, and stable housing. With the passage of HB 3018, it has the power to bring us some of those funds.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions/concerns at our office phone: 503-325-5735.

Respectfully,

Paola Velazquez  
*Bilingual/Bicultural Direct Service Advocate, Housing Navigator, Family Engagement Coordinator*