



February 5, 2025

Re: Support for Victims of Crime Act Grants (HB 3196)

To the Chair Rep. Kropf, Vice-Chairs Rep. Chotzen and Wallan, and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary

On behalf of Bridges Oregon, I am submitting testimony in strong support of HB 3196, which appropriates funding to the Department of Justice to backfill reductions in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants.

### **About Bridges Oregon**

Bridges Oregon is the only statewide nonprofit organization in Oregon that provides culturally and linguistically appropriate advocacy, support, and direct services for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals, including those who are survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, and other crimes. Our services are delivered in the heritage languages of our community, including American Sign Language (ASL) and other visual or tactile communication methods.

### **The Need for VOCA Support**

VOCA funding is a critical resource that enables Bridges Oregon to provide essential, life-saving services to some of Oregon's most underserved crime survivors. Without accessible services, Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing survivors face compounded barriers, including:

- **Language access challenges:** Many survivors encounter systemic communication barriers when seeking support from law enforcement, shelters, medical providers, and legal services.
- **Lack of accessible crisis response:** Traditional crisis hotlines and shelters are often inaccessible, leaving Deaf survivors without immediate or safe options.
- **Cultural stigma and isolation:** Many within the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing community experience isolation, exacerbating the trauma of abuse and reducing access to critical resources.

Bridges Oregon fills this gap by offering:

- Direct advocacy and crisis intervention in ASL and other accessible formats.
- Safety planning and case management tailored to the needs of Deaf survivors.
- Training and outreach to law enforcement, medical professionals, and service providers to improve their response to Deaf and Hard of Hearing victims.



## The Impact of Funding Cuts

VOCA funding reductions have already placed significant strain on victim service programs statewide, and without immediate financial relief, organizations like Bridges Oregon risk losing the capacity to continue providing these critical services. A loss of VOCA funding would mean:

- Fewer resources for Deaf survivors in crisis, forcing them into dangerous situations.
- Limited ability to train law enforcement and first responders on how to properly communicate with and support Deaf survivors.
- Reduced staffing and programmatic cuts, leaving a critical gap in services statewide.

## Why HB 3196 Matters

The passage of HB 3196 would provide essential bridge funding, allowing organizations like Bridges Oregon to continue serving crime victims without disruption. It is imperative that Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Oregonians have equal access to safety, justice, and healing.

Supporting victims of crime is a nonpartisan issue, and your vote to pass HB 3196 will demonstrate Oregon's commitment to ensuring that all survivors—regardless of language or disability—have access to the support they deserve.

For these reasons, we urge your support for HB 3196. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chad A. Ludwig, MSW, ADAC, CDI  
Founder and Executive Director  
Bridges Oregon, Inc.