

Good afternoon,

My name is Jessica Klein, and I am a restorative justice practitioner who specializes in cases of domestic and sexual violence. I have spent nearly a decade working at a community-based nonprofit that provides advocacy and support to survivors of gender based violence. Additionally, I sit on several county-led councils, and am contracted by the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence to provide education and training to all new advocates in the state of Oregon.

In my work, I have witnessed how Oregon Evidence Code 609 undermines the fairness and integrity of our justice system. House Bill 2641 seeks to correct these injustices. This change is essential not only for safeguarding individual rights but also for maintaining the integrity of our judicial process.

For survivors of gender based violence, it takes a tremendous amount of courage to recount your most intimate traumas in a court of law. Many of the survivors I work with are opposed or hesitant to engage with the legal system for a variety of reasons. For some, it is a fear that they will not be believed and a concern that their criminal history could be used to discredit or embarrass them.

Survivors often resort to behavior that goes against their values in an effort to survive the abuse. For example, survivors who resort to using force or violence against their abusive partner in an effort to prevent their abuser from hurting their children may be charged with a felony assault due to mandatory domestic violence arrest laws.

Survivors of gender based violence are 15 times more likely to abuse alcohol and 9 times more likely to use substances to cope with the trauma of the abuse, which can lead to poor decision making, impulse control, and behavioral issues that can lead to felony charges or misdemeanors that could be introduced to undermine their credibility, without any consideration of whether the convictions are even related to credibility.

In addition to their fear of having to confront the person who harmed them in court, survivors are then also faced with the fact that their past criminal history will be brought up in an effort to undermine and

discredit their lived experience. Having a criminal history or substance use disorder doesn't mean a survivor is lying—in fact, it only makes them more vulnerable to abuse as they are less likely to be believed when they do make a report to law enforcement.

Supporting House Bill 2641 means endorsing a more equitable legal standard—one that respects the right of every person to be judged by the relevance and reliability of their current testimony, not by an unrelated past. I urge you to join me in supporting this bill, which is a critical step toward a fairer, more just legal system for all Oregonians, and survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jessica Klein