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We believe that everyone deserves to live a life free from violence.

March 18, 2025

Dear Co-Chairs Campos, Valderrama, and members of the Human Services SubCommittee of the Joint Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Emmy Ritter, I am the Executive Director of Raphael House of Portland and I am submitting this testimony to urge your support of SB 5526, and particularly regarding the specialized programs that support survivors of gender-based violence and their children in the Department of Human Services Budget.

Raphael House of Portland has been providing safety and support services for survivors of domestic violence, including children, since 1977. Beyond providing a confidential emergency shelter for these families, we offer ongoing, wrap-around services for as long as they need, to help them navigate the challenges they face after leaving an abusive relationship.

The Department of Human Services provides critical safety net services and programs that can quite literally save the lives of survivors and their children fleeing violence and seeking safety and security. **Temporary Assistance to Domestic Violence Survivors (TA-DVS), Co-Located Domestic Violence Advocates**, and the **Survivor Investment Partnership** are of the utmost importance in these times of crisis. We urge the Committee to prioritize the stability and flexibility of these programs.

Gender-based violence is a major public health problem, both nationally and here in Oregon. National surveys estimate that over a third of adults in Oregon experience domestic violence in their lifetimes, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention [reports](#) that intimate partners are responsible for approximately one in five homicides nationwide. From 2009 through 2019, Oregon's Statewide Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team [identified](#) a total of 393 fatal domestic violence incidents that resulted in 532 deaths. Children witnessed violence in [nearly 1 in 4](#) (22%) intimate partner violence cases filed in state courts.

Despite the clear and documented need, there are far too few prevention resources available for victims. In 2024, 88% of requests for emergency shelter and transitional housing by domestic violence survivors in Oregon [went unmet](#), due to lack of resources, indicating a significant resource gap. A recent [study indicated](#) that domestic violence was the cause for 49% of women experiencing homelessness in Oregon and Washington.

Against the above backdrop, the three programs outlined below are of critical importance to the lives of survivors and their children.

The TA-DVS program has saved lives: Victims fleeing abuse at home face many barriers to safety, and the shelter system is unable to address all of these barriers. The TA-DVS program can provide a crucial first step through those barriers for many victims and their children. Safe separation from an abusive partner often requires relocation, lock changes, and other security measures. Victims may be forced to leave all of their personal belongings behind in the crisis. Many survivors simply do not have the resources required to surmount these obstacles for themselves and their children. When other resources are not available, TA-DVS funds can be a critical safety support, enabling victims to get into safe housing and to protect themselves and their children from further violence.

The Co-Located Domestic Violence Advocate program is crucial to supporting effective intervention and connecting survivors to longer term support structures: This best-practice program improves child and family safety, reduces trauma, and enhances service coordination. DV advocates co-located at child welfare and self sufficiency offices help case workers assess risk factors and protective measures more effectively, leading to better-informed case decisions that prioritize child safety without unnecessarily separating families.

Survivors of domestic violence are often hesitant to engage with state workers due to fears of losing custody. Co-located advocates provide confidential, survivor-centered support, making it more likely that victims will seek help and stay engaged in safety planning. Having domestic violence specialists embedded in child welfare offices facilitates faster referrals, streamlined communication, and more effective case management, ensuring families receive the right services at the right time.

The Survivor Investment Partnership (SIP) is of particular importance to ensuring access to culturally specific services for survivors: SIP seeks to expand the reach of advocacy services to survivors across Oregon, including Tribal communities and individuals without children, ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to the support they need. By providing meaningful financial assistance, SIP empowers survivors to make decisions that best support their safety and stability. This autonomy enables survivors to address their unique needs effectively. SIP partners with the Nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon, culturally responsive providers, and co-located advocacy agencies to deliver services tailored to the cultural contexts of survivors, thereby improving engagement and outcomes. By focusing on increasing accessibility, providing financial support, and offering culturally responsive services, SIP aligns with best practices in supporting survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Sincerely,



Emmy Ritter, MSW
Executive Director
Raphael House of Portland