



Dear Chair Kropf, Vice Chairs Andersen and Wallan, and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB 4123. My name is Martina Shabram and I am the Executive Director of Sexual Assault Support Services of Lane County. We strongly urge you to pass HB 3582, including the dash-1 amendment, to help ensure that all survivors of sexual violence can access justice on their own terms.

SASS provides 24/7/365 support for survivors of sexual violence. One of the core services that we provide is legal advocacy, so we see firsthand, every day, just how hard it is for survivors to seek justice and healing through our legal systems. We understand that statutes of limitation are important elements of the legal system. However, for sexual violence survivors, what current Oregon statutes of limitation truly limit is a survivor's ability to access justice on their own time frame. Decades of research shows that addressing the trauma of sexual violence is messy, laborious, time consuming, and unique to each individual -- it's not something we can easily set on a calendar.


There are many reasons why people may take years, even decades, to acknowledge to themselves and others that they have experienced sexual violence. These reasons can include fear of reprisal or further harm, shame and stigma, lack of knowledge, and more. Additionally, many survivors *try* to seek help and are rebuffed, often suffering consequences and enduring secondary trauma as a result. While each survivor's experience is unique, some stories are emblematic of the complex social pressures that inhibit survivors from accessing justice. In the 2006 study "Being silenced: the impact of negative social reactions on the disclosure of rape,"<sup>1</sup> a survivor referred to as Marie explains that, after having experienced an assault, she tried multiple times to seek help and was turned away each time. She told her mother, who directed her to keep it a secret: "it was [your] fault. Shut up and don't you tell anybody what you did." Then she told two friends, who responded: "Forget it, it's over, it was your fault, leave it alone." She continued to try to seek support and told her priest in confession. He told her that God was punishing her. After all this, she said that she stopped seeking help, feeling that she was the "dirtiest thing in God's earth." The researchers note that it took Marie years to seek counseling or share her experience again with friends, and even still relied "mainly on herself ... for support." She had not sought legal remedies.

I don't know this survivor, but my agency works with hundreds of people every year whose experiences mirror hers. When you consider HB 3582, I'd ask you to think about the people we serve, people like Marie. Consider the obstacles they have faced in order to arrive at our door – how many times they may have tried to get help and been punished for asking. And think about how much additional trauma and betrayal they experience when they finally take that impossibly challenging step and we have to tell them: it's too late. Additionally, the dash-1 amendment also

removes a major legal hurdle for survivors. Having heard hundreds of survivors share about the ways they have been betrayed and dismissed when seeking institutional help – like Marie when she disclosed to her priest – this standard seems wildly out of step with those lived experiences.

HB 3582 is about critically important technical, legal language, but those details can obscure what this bill is really about: how much unbelievable strength of will it takes for any one of those survivors to break the culture of silence about sexual violence and abuse, and seek healing and justice on their own terms. Eliminating the statute of limitations centers survivors and sends the message that Oregon trusts survivors, believes survivors, and wants to help them access the legal remedies that they deserve. I urge you to join me in supporting HB 3582.

Thank you for your consideration.  
In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martina Shabram', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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Citations:

<sup>1</sup> Ahrens CE. Being silenced: the impact of negative social reactions on the disclosure of rape. American Journal of Community Psychology. 2006 Dec; 38(3-4):263-74.