

Domestic Violence Clinic Written Testimony

05.01.2025

Co-Chairs Sollman and Ruiz and members of the Committee, my name is Maryn Sommerfeldt and I am an attorney and recent alumni of the University of Oregon School of Law. I was involved in the Domestic Violence Clinic during my second and third years of law school. I participated in the Domestic Violence Clinic for a multitude of reasons, most significantly because I am passionate about gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, but also because I wanted to gain practical experience representing clients in a courtroom. I am here today to urge you to continue supporting this vital State Program. The Clinic plays a unique and irreplaceable role in both Oregon's legal education system and its commitment to survivor safety.

The Domestic Violence Clinic is unique from the other legal clinics offered at the University of Oregon School of Law. This Clinic offers students regular exposure to a courtroom education. We are held to a high standard, expected to lead a case from early client interviews to trial and resolution. Through this process, we work long hours mulling over evidence and case law, perfecting our arguments, and prepping our clients. The time we spend with our clients—helping them process their trauma into productive testimony—allows us to build relationships with them, in a way other clinics cannot.

What this Clinic produces are committed, passionate, professional future lawyers. I can almost guarantee that every student who has participated in the Domestic Violence Clinic has surpassed their required hours of service, and has lost sleep (or cried) over their cases and clients.

The first trial I argued was a Protective Order case, where a mother was grabbed and pushed by her ex-husband during a parenting exchange. In the first meeting I had with this client, her anxiety and fear was palpable (my nervousness was likely noticeable to her, too). But as I spent the next couple months meeting with her regularly, reviewing photos and video, and developing her case, I began to see her fear turn to hope. In the courtroom, that hope turned to courage, and then resolve, as she stared down her abuser from the witness stand while I put on my case-in-chief. When the Judge ruled in my client's favor, my client cried and hugged me, thanking me for what I had done for her and her children. An experience like that cannot happen from inside the walls of a lecture hall.

When programs like the Domestic Violence Clinic are well-funded, the legal profession as a whole stands to benefit. Each student leaves this Clinic a more dedicated, thoughtful, compassionate, professional, and zealous legal practitioner than when they started. Without this Clinic in place, students will miss out on educational milestones and the vulnerable communities we serve will suffer.

The University of Oregon Domestic Violence Clinic has forever changed my life, and it has forever changed my clients' lives. Your support of this Program will continue to have an immeasurable impact on the students and communities it serves. On behalf of my fellow alumni and our clients, I thank you for your past support of this Clinic and respectfully request your continued investment.