



# Oregon Alliance to End Gender-Based Violence

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February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2026

## Support for SB 1550 – Identifying Hidden Homicides

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1550 on behalf of the Oregon Alliance to End Gender Based Violence. Founded in 1999, the Alliance is a statewide grassroots network of survivors, advocates, and programs serving survivors across the state. The Alliance is dedicated to promoting legislation in Oregon that will protect and empower survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Thank you to Senator Gelser for bringing this bill forward and to Kellee Harris for her brave leadership on this issue.

SB 1550 addresses a devastating and too-often overlooked reality: some deaths classified as suicide, overdose, or accident are, in fact, domestic violence–related homicides. When these cases are not identified, families do not receive justice, perpetrators escape accountability, and communities are at continued risk.

From 2013 to 2024, at least 386 Oregonians died from domestic violence–related homicide. Nearly a quarter of women who seek domestic violence services report prior suicidal ideation or attempts, a vulnerability that abusers may exploit to conceal lethal violence. As documented in the materials before you, these misclassified deaths – known as “Hidden Homicides” – represent a profound failure of systems meant to protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

Advocates across the State of Oregon every day sit with survivors who have been strangled, isolated, stalked, and terrorized – often by partners who control every aspect of their lives. We know that nonfatal strangulation, coercive control, and threats of self-harm or homicide are among the strongest predictors of future lethal violence. When a known victim of domestic violence is found dead under suspicious circumstances, failure to recognize these warning signs can mean that a homicide is never identified, an abuser is never investigated, and other victims remain at risk.

SB 1550 provides a thoughtful, evidence-based response to this problem. It does not presume homicide; rather, it ensures careful, consistent investigation when clear red flags are present. The bill’s framework – modeled after Joanna’s Law in California – establishes reasonable, trauma-informed safeguards that many families assume already exist.

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Key provisions of the bill:

- Requires more thorough investigations and autopsies when multiple red flags of domestic violence or child abuse are present;
- Ensures families are notified of their rights to request records, autopsies, and inquests;
- Clarifies access to medical examiner records, including photos and videos, so families can seek independent review when appropriate; and
- Allows for independent review when a death is closed without a homicide determination.

These provisions matter deeply to survivors and families. Too often, families tell us they were excluded from the process, denied information, or dismissed when they raised concerns about a loved one's abusive partner. SB 1550 helps restore trust by centering transparency, accountability, and due process.

Most importantly, this bill sends a clear message: the lives of domestic violence victims matter. Recognizing hidden homicides is not only about justice for victims – it is about preventing future violence by identifying dangerous patterns and perpetrators before more lives are lost. For survivors still living in fear, and for families seeking truth and accountability, we urge you to support SB 1550.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to ending domestic violence in Oregon.