

Oral Testimony – February 2, 2026 – SB 1550

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

I am Kellee Harris and I am testifying in support of **SB 1550**, a bill resulting from the **failures** surrounding the **death investigations** of three young women including our daughter, Kelsey Noelle Harris, a 31-year-old Lebanon High School counselor and coach.



On March 28th, 2021, Kelsey was found dead from a gunshot to her head. Despite a documented history of domestic violence, a death investigator ruled her death a suicide within **just 14 minutes**. I believe Kelsey was **murdered** and her death staged to look like a suicide—a textbook "**Hidden Homicide**."

SB 1550 will provide:

1: Mandatory Investigations requiring forensic reviews when **THREE of 10 research-based "red flags"** of a suspicious death are present. **Kelsey's case had SEVEN**, including a felony strangulation assault by her abuser a week prior to her death. This bill **ensures abuse history** triggers a full investigation.

2: Right to Information and Notifications We were never informed of our right to request an autopsy. SB 1550 mandates **immediate** family notification of these rights. In Kelsey's case, the lack of an autopsy and toxicology report meant vital forensic evidence was lost forever.

3: Access to Evidence and Transparency including family's rights to timely photos and reports. We faced lengthy delays in accessing Kelsey's records. After **four years of repeated requests**, we were finally informed the death investigator "**accidentally**" **deleted** all her crime scene photos. This bill ensures transparency and prevents evidence from being "lost."

4: Right to Independent Review at the family's expense. Our family hired **three** crime scene experts. They called for additional investigation, suggesting **the scene had been staged** based on blood spatter analysis, incorrectly identified bullet entry and exit points, gun placement and body position, among many other findings. Additionally, an expert in **suicide note authentication using proprietary software** confirmed Kelsey's alleged suicide text was **fake**.

In summary, Kelsey once wrote in a graduate college essay, "***Don't ever settle for anything less than everything you deserve.***"

Oregonians deserve a death investigation system built on courage and forensic facts, NOT administrative convenience.

Senators, **THREE FAMILIES HERE TODAY** have been victimized **TWICE: FIRST** by an abuser, and **SECOND** by a system that treated our daughters' deaths as **cases to be closed** rather than **lives to be valued**.

I urge you to pass **SB 1550** to ensure "***justice for all***" includes domestic violence victims whose deaths are staged to look like suicides. We can no longer allow abusers to get away with murder in Oregon.

Thank you

Kellee Harris, *Mother of Kelsey Harris*

(A longer written testimony submitted for the record follows on the next two pages)

Written Testimony in Support of SB 1550: Hidden Homicide

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

My name is Kellee Harris. I am submitting this written testimony not just as a citizen of Oregon who votes, but as a mother carrying the weight of a dead daughter. I am here to honor the memory of our daughter, Kelsey Noelle Harris, and to advocate for the passage of Senate Bill 1550—the "Hidden Homicide" bill.

Lately, our nation has witnessed horrific murders out in the open in our streets, captured on body cams and citizen videos. I am testifying on behalf of all victims of murders happening behind closed doors—crimes with no cameras, no witnesses, and often, no justice. These are the deaths of domestic violence victims perpetrated by their abusers, often reported by the perpetrators themselves as "suicides, accidents or overdoses" to cover a homicide.

Kelsey was a 31-year-old high school counselor, teacher, and coach at Lebanon High School. She was an energetic educator who dedicated her life to helping students find their way and loved working with them in the classroom and on the field.

On March 28, 2021, our world was shattered. We received a visit from a Clackamas County Sheriff stating that Kelsey was dead. That night, within 14 minutes arriving at the crime scene, a death investigator had ruled Kelsey died by suicide before a single forensic test was conducted. No autopsy or toxicology report was ordered.

Kelsey's case is the definitive example of why the four pillars of SB 1550 are a moral necessity for the state of Oregon.

Pillar 1: Mandatory Investigations and the "Red Flag" Protocol

SB 1550 requires forensic reviews and mandatory interviews when at least three specific "red flags" are identified. In Kelsey's case, **SEVEN out of ten** research-documented red flags were present.

Just one week before her death, Kelsey's abuser had been arrested and charged with felony strangulation and misdemeanor assault. He was released without bail two days later. No one knew his whereabouts for twelve hours following his release. When Kelsey was found dead in her carport, still in the coaching sweats she wore to her girl's high school soccer practice that day, the police did not see a correlation between a violent strangulation a week earlier and the gunshot wound to her head that caused her suspicious death.

To this day, despite our requests over the past five years, no investigator has ever interviewed our family members. SB 1550 ensures that when a victim with a history of domestic violence dies an untimely death, law enforcement is mandated to look at the history of abuse and contact the victim's parents for more information.

Pillar 2: Right to Information and Notifications

When Kelsey died, we were in a state of profound shock. We were told her body had been taken to a local funeral home and were given a phone number to "follow up on burial details." We were never informed of our right to request an autopsy, a toxicology report, or an inquest by the District Attorney.

SB 1550 mandates that families be notified of these rights immediately. Because we weren't informed, no autopsy was performed. No toxicology tests were run. No testing for gunpowder residue was conducted on her body. Vital forensic truths were buried with her because the system prioritized a quick closure over a correct

one. Families must be empowered with information before the chance for a thorough investigation is lost forever.

Pillar 3: Access to Evidence and Transparency

For years, we faced systemic barriers and bureaucratic "arrogance" while trying to obtain Kelsey's records. I was told that despite Kelsey dying intestate and unmarried, I could not access her files without filing a small estate affidavit and awaiting county approval.

SB 1550 clarifies that specified family members have an explicit right to access photos, videos, and reports associated with a death investigation. During our struggle for transparency, after four years of repeated requests, the death investigator admitted to "accidentally" deleting all of Kelsey's crime scene photos. The DA admitted they had no county death investigation protocol in place for death investigators. This bill creates a standard of transparency that prevents evidence from being hidden, lost, or shielded by the "active investigation" excuse in cases that have already been prematurely closed.

Pillar 4: The Right to Independent Review

When I finally secured an appointment with the District Attorney assigned to Kelsey's case five months after her death, I was told the strangulation charges were dropped because Kelsey "was dead and could not testify." He then told me, "Mrs. Harris, you'll never get justice in the courts. If you want justice, go change the laws."

SB 1550 grants families the right to seek an independent review of the cause and manner of death at their own expense. We were forced to hire our own experts. They called for additional investigation, suggesting the scene had been staged based on blood spatter analysis, incorrectly identified bullet entry and exit points, gun placement and body position, among many other findings. Additionally, an expert in suicide note authentication using proprietary software confirmed Kelsey's alleged suicide text was fake.

Despite this, the DA adamantly refused our request for an independent review, stating he was "satisfied" Kelsey took her own life and disallowed all expert crime scene reports. When presented the same reports, the Medical Examiner concurred with no report of findings and no explanation in writing, refusing our request to change the cause of death from suicide to undetermined or homicide. This pillar provides a necessary check and balance against the indifference of local officials.

Conclusion

We have often heard from officials: "We're sorry for your loss, but it's too late," or "there's nothing we can do." There is something we can do today. We can pass SB 1550.

Research shows that a victim of domestic strangulation is **750% more likely** to be murdered by her abuser. We cannot continue to allow these "hidden homicides" to be swept under the rug of administrative convenience. Three families in Linn County have been victimized twice: first by an abuser, and second by a system that treated our daughters' lives as cases to be closed rather than lives to be valued.

Kelsey once wrote in a college essay: *"Don't ever settle for anything less than everything you deserve."* Kelsey deserved a thorough investigation. Our family and others deserve transparency. The victims of Oregon deserve a system that upholds the promise of "justice for all." Please pass SB 1550 and stop Hidden Homicides in Oregon for good, and abusers from getting away with murder. Thank you.

Kellee Harris, *Mother of Kelsey Harris*