

February 3, 2026

Greetings,

I submit this testimony on SB 1550 (2026) as a private citizen who is interested in good governance and precision in the legislative process. I am not taking a position on the legislation, but I submit these comments in acknowledgment of the bill's significance, the likelihood that it will pass, and the importance of getting the details right.

I understand from the February 2, 2026, informational hearing that some amendments may be forthcoming, so please accept my apologies if the following comments – which are based on wording of the bill as introduced – may have been addressed by some of those amendments, which I have not yet seen.

1. Section 3 of SB 1550 is triggered when a person appears to have died by accident, suicide, or overdose and that person “has previously been identified as a victim of domestic violence or actual or suspected child abuse” in certain official reports -- but also in any “writings or photographs” or “other evidence.” As written, this section would appear to be triggered (in apparent cases of suicide, accident, or overdose) whenever *anybody* has evidence that the decedent was a victim of domestic violence or child abuse. **What if the officer investigating the death is not aware of that evidence?**

Take a few examples. Some “writings or photographs” documenting abuse may not be available to *any* police agency because somebody outside of law enforcement (a medical provider? a motel desk clerk? the victim's friend?) took pictures or otherwise documented signs of domestic violence or child abuse. Or abuse might have been documented in another state, before the victim traveled to (and died) in Oregon. If no actual arrest is made, information about a domestic-violence incident that police are aware of in one Oregon jurisdiction may not be included in databases available to other Oregon law enforcement officers. In short, there are many circumstances in which a person may have “previously been identified” as an abuse victim – but officers investigating the person's death will not be aware of that. **Is the law meant to cover those situations?**

Assuming that the law is not meant to be triggered when investigating officers do not know (and may not have reason to know) that the decedent previously was identified as an abuse victim, I recommend the draft be amended to specify what information the officer investigating the death must have before the requirements of Section 3 are triggered.

2. Under Section 3 of SB 1550, investigators are required to take specific steps when three or more conditions (“red flags”) occur in association with the death of a person who has previously been identified as an abuse victim if the death is suspected to be the result of suicide, overdose, or accident. However, several of the listed “red flags” will be present at many scenes of suicide, accident, or overdose – including those in which the decedent is not an abuse victim.

For example, when a young or middle-aged person dies by apparent suicide at home, three of the “red flag” conditions are met: (a) the person died prematurely, (b) the scene of death suggests death by suicide, and (f) the decedent is found dead at home.

The result of this is that investigators will be required to take the steps outlined in Section 3 of SB 1550 in many cases where an abuse victim dies by suicide (or accident or overdose) even when nothing about the scene is unusual compared to other scenes of suicide (or accident or overdose). That may well be the intention of the legislation’s proponents, but I thought it worth pointing out that at least some of the “red flags” are not out of the ordinary in cases of suicide, accident, or overdose.

3. The general nature of some of the listed “red flags” becomes more problematic in Section 4 of SB 1550, related to the duties of medical examiners and district attorneys. That section specifies that “a medical examiner or district attorney shall order the performance of an autopsy \* \* \* if the death appears to be due to suicide, overdose or accident, upon the occurrence of three or more” of the red flags. **Significantly, Section 4 is not limited to cases in which the decedent previously has been identified as a victim of abuse** (Section 3 is limited to such cases). Accordingly, Section 4 requires that autopsies be performed in **all** cases of apparent suicide, accident, or overdose in which at least three of the listed “red flag” conditions are met, even when the decedent has not been identified as a victim of abuse. The result is that medical examiners will be required to order autopsies in every case in which, for example, a young or middle-aged person dies at home by apparent suicide, overdose, or accident. (Conditions A, B, and F are met in all such cases.)

I suspect that Section 4 is intended to apply, like Section 3, only in cases in which the decedent has previously been identified as a victim of abuse. If I am correct, the draft should be amended to make that clear.

4. I note that Section 5, paragraph (5)(b)(B)(ii) and (iii) provide that **Section 5(b)(A)** does not affect a law enforcement agency’s discretion to carry out death investigations and does not impose any liability on a law enforcement agency in relation to death investigations. As written, however, those discretion and non-liability provisions appear to apply only to the closing of a case and the examination of records under Section 5(b)(A). **Are the discretion and non-liability provisions intended to also apply to law-enforcement actions taken under Sections 3 and 4?** If so, the bill should be amended to make that clear.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments.

Respectfully,

Erika Hadlock