

February 4, 2026

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

On behalf of survivor service agencies across the Portland metropolitan region, we write in strong support of Senate Bill 1550.

Our agencies serve individuals and families impacted by domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse every day. We also support families whose loved ones have died under circumstances initially classified as suicide, overdose, or accident—only to later uncover indicators of abuse that were missed, minimized, or never fully examined. SB 1550 responds directly to this gap by requiring heightened scrutiny in death investigations when a decedent has a known history of experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, or child abuse.

The connection between abuse and homicide is well established. Domestic violence is one of the strongest predictors of lethal violence, and perpetrators of abuse are disproportionately represented among homicide offenders and perpetrators of mass shootings. Within this context, non-fatal strangulation is one of the clearest and most dangerous indicators of future homicide. Research consistently shows that individuals who have been strangled by an intimate partner are approximately 750% more likely to be killed by that person. Strangulation often leaves little visible injury, yet it signals extreme control, escalating violence, and imminent lethality. Additionally, when a survivor is attempting to leave a person who is abusing them, there is a 75% greater risk of severe violence in the *two years following the separation*.

Many domestic violence–related homicides are preceded by coercive control, prior assaults, strangulation, threats of death, and repeated system contact. In some cases, perpetrators actively manipulate death scenes to make homicides appear as accidents, overdoses, or suicides—particularly when the victim has a known history of mental health challenges or substance use. Without deliberate safeguards, these deaths risk being prematurely misclassified.

Those of us working in the field already operate under the clear understanding that experiencing domestic violence can mean death. This reality is reflected across our systems of care: law enforcement conducts lethality assessments on scene; district attorneys maintain specialized domestic violence and child abuse units; and community-based providers operate confidential shelters because the risk of homicide is real and ever-

present. Our entire system of victim response is built on the assumption of potential lethality.

Yet when a death occurs, that same level of concern is not always applied during the investigation—especially when domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, or strangulation are part of the victim’s history. SB 1550 helps close that gap.

This bill establishes thoughtful, survivor-informed safeguards by:

- Requiring family interviews when multiple red flags are present, including histories of abuse or strangulation;
- Mandating written autopsy requests when there is a reasonable basis to suspect abuse-related death;
- Ensuring families are informed of their rights and can access investigative records; and
- Supporting accurate determinations of cause and manner of death without interfering with lawful investigative discretion.

SB 1550 affirms that family members are not obstacles to investigations, but critical sources of information—particularly when abuse has occurred behind closed doors. It recognizes that histories of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and strangulation must be treated as relevant, material evidence in death investigations, not incidental background.

From our collective experience, accurate death investigations are essential not only for justice and accountability, but for prevention. When abuse-related homicides are correctly identified, systems can intervene more effectively, future victims may be protected, and public trust in our institutions is strengthened.

Our systems of victim care already assume the risk of homicide. SB 1550 ensures that our death investigation practices rise to meet that same concern when domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, or strangulation are present in a victim’s history.

We respectfully urge the Committee to pass SB 1550 and affirm Oregon’s commitment to survivor-informed justice, thorough investigations, and community safety.

Sincerely,

The Tri-County (Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas Counties) Public Policy Committee