

BILL NO: House Bill 4157
TITLE: Relating to hearsay; prescribing an effective date.
COMMITTEE: House Committee on Judiciary
DATE: February 9, 2026
POSITION: SUPPORT

Dear Chairperson Kropf and committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 4157. This bill represents an important and thoughtful step toward improving Oregon's response to sex trafficking and related commercial sexual exploitation offenses, while maintaining essential safeguards for fairness and due process.

Shared Hope International is a non-profit organization dedicated to preventing, restoring, and bringing justice to survivors of child and youth sex trafficking. Shared Hope has been working in Oregon, across the country, and throughout the globe for over 25 years to guide and support appropriate responses to protect survivors, hold offenders to account, and ultimately prevent the crime entirely.

Reporting sexual exploitation and participating in a resulting investigation or prosecution is daunting for any victim. For survivors of sex trafficking and other commercial sex crimes, it can be especially overwhelming. Many survivors have endured prolonged coercion, manipulation, and trauma, and the criminal justice process itself can require them to recount deeply personal and painful experiences in ways that risk re-traumatization. As a result, survivors may struggle to provide clear, consistent testimony in court—particularly long after the exploitation occurred—even when their accounts are truthful and credible.

HB 4157 responds to these realities by allowing courts to admit certain out-of-court statements made by victims in close proximity to the commercial sex act, provided those statements demonstrate sufficient indicia of reliability. These statements—often made to law enforcement, emergency responders, or other officials—frequently capture critical details while events are still fresh and before fear, intimidation, or trauma interfere with a survivor's ability to speak. Allowing courts to consider this evidence strengthens prosecutions while reducing the system's reliance on repeated, in-court testimony that can cause additional harm to victims.

Importantly, this bill does not lower evidentiary standards or undermine defendants' rights. The hearsay exception created by HB 4157 is carefully limited and includes multiple safeguards. Statements are admissible only when they are closely connected in time to the offense and when the court finds clear indicators of reliability, such as corroborating evidence, the declarant's personal knowledge, and the manner in which the statement was made. These requirements ensure that only credible, non-testimonial evidence is admitted and that constitutional protections remain intact.

This approach aligns with best practices in victim-centered prosecutions and reflects a growing understanding nationwide that sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation cases present unique evidentiary challenges. Crimes that occur in secrecy, under coercion, and without witnesses cannot be addressed effectively using traditional evidentiary frameworks alone. By modernizing Oregon's evidence code, HB 4157 helps ensure that perpetrators are held accountable while survivors are not forced to bear unnecessary additional trauma in order to seek justice.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support HB 4157. This bill strengthens Oregon's ability to prosecute serious exploitation offenses, centers the lived experiences of survivors, and preserves the fairness and integrity of the judicial process.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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Director of Advocacy

For questions or additional information:
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