



# Oregon Alliance to End Gender-Based Violence

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February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026

## Concerns Re: SB 1579 – Child Abuse Reporting

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding concerns about unintended consequences of Senate Bill 1579. We think a simple amendment could address the concerns while preserving the intent of the bill to address truly malicious behavior. Creation of clear statutory immunity for good faith reports, or requiring malicious intent as an element of the crime would help reduce unintended consequences while also targeting truly criminal behavior.

SB 1579 proposes to expand and escalate criminal penalties for individuals who make false reports of child abuse, elevating what is now a violation to a range of higher sanctions, including jail time and fines for repeat offenses.

While no one should knowingly make a false report – and accountability for intentional misuse of reporting systems is a legitimate concern – this bill, as written, raises serious unintended consequences especially for survivors of domestic violence and the professionals who support them.

**Fear of Reporting Among Victims and Supporters:** Domestic violence survivors often face intense barriers when contemplating disclosure, especially where children are involved. Perpetrators of abuse frequently weaponize child welfare systems, threatening to involve authorities to maintain control and silence victims. Enhancing penalties without clear safeguards risks deepening the fear survivors already feel about reporting, particularly if they or their advocates worry that misinterpretation of nuanced situations could lead to criminal charges.

Often, we hear from survivors who are afraid to report abuse or seek care because of fear of ramifications. Sometimes, erroneous reports made in the context of abuse are based on fear, confusion, or incomplete information – not malicious deceit. The fear of being penalized for those complex human experiences with increasingly severe criminal sanctions may deter legitimate reporting rather than protect children and families.

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Due to safety reasons, survivors often report child abuse and/or domestic violence for the first time when leaving an abusive relationship. Despite the logical reason for doing so, survivors are often punished or lose credibility due to claims that they are making it up to influence a family law case. And, if a threat or concern about child abuse is real, it would certainly be something that *should* influence a family law case. Making a report that is determined to be false an actual crime would exacerbate this misunderstanding of the nature of domestic violence/child abuse, and why many reports happen for the first time upon leaving or separation.

**Chilling Effect on Advocates, Professionals, and Support Networks:** Victim advocates, social workers, health professionals, teachers, counselors, and others regularly face situations where they must act in a child's and family's best interests by alerting systems of possible harm. They often operate in ambiguous, high-risk contexts where the margin for certainty is slim.

SB 1579 does not — on its face — articulate clear definitions protecting good-faith reporting. Without statutory language explicitly shielding those who reasonably believe abuse has occurred, we risk:

- Criminalizing advocates and professionals who err on the side of safety;
- Discouraging mandatory reporters from acting;
- Creating confusion and hesitation among those entrusted with child and family well-being.

As was stated in other written testimony, it is not the role of a mandatory reporter to conduct an investigation into whether child abuse is occurring. Their responsibility is to make a report to DHS when they have any suspicion that abuse may be occurring. We know that child abuse is already underreported; we do not want to exacerbate that problem.

This is especially concerning in domestic violence contexts, where the lines between emotional abuse, coercive control, and physical harm can be subtle and evolving. Penal consequences must not outweigh the imperative to act in the face of potential harm.

**Alternatives Worth Considering:** Protecting children and families from abuse is a shared priority. But SB 1579's increased penalties for false reporting — absent strong, explicit protections for legitimate, good-faith reporting — risk silencing critical disclosures, undermining survivor confidence, and creating perverse incentives that harm the very people our systems are meant to protect. **Creation of clear statutory immunity for good faith reports, or requiring malicious intent as an element of the crime would help reduce unintended consequences while also targeting truly criminal behavior.**

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to oppose SB 1579 in its current form and consider amendments that center survivor safety, clarity on good-faith reporting, and equitable outcomes for families impacted by violence.