



256 Warner Milne Road, Oregon City, OR 97045
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January 29, 2023

Re: Support for SB 799 to reduce evictions and prevent homelessness

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Anderson, and members of the Committee,

I serve as the Executive Director of Clackamas Women's Services (CWS) and have worked in the victim services field for over 25 years. We strongly urge you to pass SB 799 as quickly as possible as part of the Homelessness Prevention Package that includes \$100 million in rent new rent assistance, SB 611 / HB 2733 to limit the exorbitant and abusive rent increases too many landlords are imposing this year, and the Rental Market Data Bill for greater transparency into this essential component of Oregon's housing availability.

The mission of Clackamas Women's Services (CWS) is to break the isolation of domestic and sexual violence. Incorporated in 1985 as Clackamas County's first domestic violence shelter, CWS is a community-based organization providing comprehensive, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed services to survivors of domestic/dating violence, sexual assault, elder and vulnerable adult abuse, human trafficking, exploitation, and stalking.

A safe and stable place to call home is a basic human need.

According to the ACLU, and other sources, domestic violence is the third leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Violence is also a significant public health issue that affects all aspects of an individual's well-being. Oregon has one of the highest rates of domestic and sexual violence in the nation, making the connection between domestic and sexual violence, homelessness, and health a significant public concern. In a study conducted by the National Alliance to End Family Homelessness, 46% of homeless women report having stayed in an abusive relationship because they did not have a safe alternative.

At CWS we have worked diligently to provide emergency shelter as well as stable housing for over 50% more households since the onset of the pandemic. Victims/survivors in their children are in housing with safety plans that are specifically tied to their current homes. Safe and stable housing, along with access to supportive networks, are fundamental elements that influence social determinants of health. For individuals and families displaced by domestic and sexual violence, elder abuse, and trafficking the possibility of housing insecurity and even homelessness, often looms large. In their escape from their abusers, victims are often cut off from the resources that support daily living. Leaving them with nothing more than the clothes on their back and their children in tow, victims can be overwhelmed and isolated by fear and uncertainty. Circumstances can be even calamitous for victims from marginalized populations and communities experiencing oppression and inequities.

Preserving housing stability is essential for all survivors of sexual and domestic violence in Oregon. Housing instability and homelessness increase the risk of experiencing violence and abuse. 83% of domestic violence survivors entering shelters identified “finding housing I can afford” as a need. Survivors establishing safe homes for themselves and their families are often rent-burdened, and one unexpected debt or rent increase can cause possible homelessness. Families at risk need time to access rent assistance and services so they don’t face displacement and danger.

Reducing evictions is an essential part response to addressing domestic and sexual violence, elder and child abuse, trafficking, and stalking in our community. As Gov. Kotek and legislative leadership commit to increasing the housing supply and rehousing our homeless neighbors, we must also ensure that the people who are housed today don’t end up on the streets themselves.

Sincerely,



Melissa Erlbaum
Executive Director