



April 6, 2021

Senate Committee on Housing and Development  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for SB 271-1

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is to be a voice and force for the common good for all Oregon children, ensuring all children have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. OCO is the result of the merger between two historic Oregon non-profits: The Children's Trust Fund of Oregon and Children First for Oregon. We elevate data and lived experience to prioritize children and center communities. We continue to connect a community of 115 advocates, coalitions, and organizations through The Children's Agenda, a legislative agenda championing equitable state legislative policies and shared investments to improving the lives of Oregon's children and their families.

### The Children's Agenda

*is a broad slate of equitable investments and policy solutions to meet the holistic needs of Oregon children, youth, and their families.*

**SB 271-1 to Enhance Domestic Violence Support Services is part of the 2021 Children's Agenda.** SB 271-1 will continue and increase funding to community-based and culturally specific DVSA programs to assist survivors with housing needs, and fund prevention services to support survivors at risk of becoming unhoused due to DVSA.

In 2019, both the Oregon Alliance to End Violence Against Women and the National Network to End Domestic Violence found housing stability to be the greatest issue and unmet need facing survivors in Oregon. In the same year, Oregon DVSA shelters were forced to turn away more than 8,000 requests for emergency shelter due to lack of capacity.

The ongoing crises of the last year have made access to stable housing more difficult for those who are in abusive situations. One year ago, after shelter-in-place orders took effect, victim services were acutely aware that violence in the home would escalate or worsen. Community-based domestic violence programs saw an exponential growth in calls to hotlines and requests for safe, emergency shelter.

With the constraints of pandemic restrictions, programs have had to utilize motel stays as safe shelters more than ever before. Without funding to maintain this type of sheltering, advocates are forced to turn



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survivors away from emergency shelter. Emergency shelter is a crucial step in ending both the cycle of violence and the potential cycle of being unhoused while also trying to stay safe from an abuser. Funding for both emergency shelter and steps to achieve permanent housing dramatically changes the ability of community-based and culturally specific DVSA programs to help survivors rebuild their lives free of violence.

The effects of housing instability go beyond the need for temporary, emergency shelter: housing instability affects social determinants of health such economic stability, access to education, and even access to quality healthcare. According to the CDC, homelessness is connected to negative impacts on physical and mental health, including substance abuse and mental illness. These outcomes for those who are unhoused are compounded by lack of access to care and limited resources.

Oregon can and must do better to support survivors of DVSA. Passage of SB 271-1 would allow domestic and sexual violence programs across the state to continue to address both the imminent danger of violence and the often-imminent threat of becoming unhoused. The bill would allow for community-based domestic violence programs to continue and grow capacity to serve survivors who are facing housing instability. Programs would be able to offer individualized assistance for those who may need to move to be safe, or who need help with landlord negotiations and housing searches, application processes, and tenant education.

Housing instability affects the most vulnerable in our communities: children, youth, disabled or elderly, communities of color, and often – survivors of interpersonal violence. The barriers caused by lack of housing, coupled with the dynamics of abuse, create insurmountable barriers to safety, health and wellness, and economic self-sufficiency.

As the growing housing crisis continues in our state, we are grateful to the lawmakers who are prioritizing the health and safety of victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence with this legislation. We urge you to pass SB 271-1.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

Chis Coughlin, Policy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement Director

Jenifer Wagley, Executive Director

*View the 2021 Children's Agenda at [www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2021-childrens-agenda](http://www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2021-childrens-agenda)*