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**Testimony Supporting SB 271-1  
Before the Senate Committee on  
Housing and Development  
April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Presented by Sybil Hebb**

***Re: Yes on SB 271-1 to assist survivors of domestic and sexual violence in navigating housing needs***

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I submit this testimony in support of SB 271 with the Dash One amendments, to ensure access to critically important housing advocacy services for survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault seeking safety and stability. Thank you to Senator Taylor for her leadership on this issue, and to Chair Jama and the committee for the time and consideration.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. A significant number of our clients come to us for help as they are struggling to escape domestic or sexual violence. We prioritize these cases, and help survivors to access protection orders, safe parenting plans, emergency assistance, and other legal protections. But our staff attorneys can only do so much, if survivors are unable to access safe, stable, and affordable housing when they flee from abuse.

Sexual and domestic violence have always been significant drivers of homelessness for women and children.<sup>1</sup> This impact has been exacerbated in Oregon as a result our housing affordability crisis. Too often, survivors fleeing violence in the home have no means of accessing alternate housing. Emergency shelters are full to capacity, and permanent affordable housing is inaccessible or unavailable. Without assistance, survivors are in the impossible position of having to choose between returning to an unsafe home or possible unsheltered homelessness.

In 2019, in recognition of this untenable position for survivors and their children, the legislature allocated pilot funding to provide housing navigation and emergency assistance for survivors seeking safety from abuse. HB 2006 provided \$3 million in funding to culturally-specific and community-based domestic and sexual violence programs, as well as to Oregon Tribes, to serve survivors who need expert assistance in finding safe, stable, and affordable housing. These funds are administered by the Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division of the Department of Justice.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://nnedv.org/latest\\_update/domestic-sexual-violence-homelessness/](https://nnedv.org/latest_update/domestic-sexual-violence-homelessness/)

Through the Housing Navigator program, specialized advocates are able to offer individualized, trauma-informed housing placement assistance within the context of culturally specific safety planning and support for survivors who need to move to be safe. The program provides advocacy to help with landlord negotiations, housing searches, application processes, tenant education, and other case management. The program also provides targeted and strategic financial assistance in the form of motel or hotel vouchers when necessary because shelter space is unavailable, and can help pay moving costs, deposits and application fees, or other one-time expenses that will facilitate housing security.

The program has been incredibly successful. Services have reached 1,823 survivors in every corner of the state. This impact is exponentially increased when we consider that almost half (48%) of survivors seeking shelter have at least one minor child with them at the time they seek safety services. In 2020, 84% of survivors receiving assistance through this program still had safe and stable housing three months after receiving assistance. And 87% of survivors receiving services reported that having stable housing has helped them keep a job, get a job, attend school, receive medical/mental health services, or successfully and safely maintain child custody.

We know that domestic violence rates have [escalated sharply](#) during the pandemic, and that housing services continue to be the highest priority need for survivors. Passage of SB 271-1 will enable the continuation and expansion of the Housing Navigator Program into the next biennium, ensuring stability of these services for survivors as we continue to weather the housing crisis and the COVID pandemic. The bill will make it possible for survivors to escape the cycle of abuse to access safe, stable, and affordable housing for themselves and their children.

On behalf of our low-income clients who are survivors of domestic or sexual violence, thank you to the committee members for the time and attention to this issue, and for your service to Oregonians.