

# womenspace

safety, hope and healing for survivors of domestic violence

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Womenspace is a  
501(c)3 nonprofit.  
Tax ID: 93-0692905

April 6, 2021

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and members of the committee,  
Re: Yes on SB 271-1

My name is Julie Weismann and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Womenspace in Eugene. Thank you for taking up SB 271-1. I strongly support this bill, which is essential for the stability and wellbeing of the victims and survivors we serve.

Womenspace serves all of Lane County, which includes Eugene, Springfield, Cottage Grove, Junction City, Oakridge, Florence, Creswell, Coburg, and Veneta as the larger cities. With 4700 square miles of both urban and rural areas, many more survivors live in smaller and more isolated communities.

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.

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. 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.

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. Beginning in March of 2020, requests for emergency shelter increased dramatically, forcing us to negotiate with multiple hotels/motels in the county. We sheltered 5 families in one day who were waiting to escape. At one point we had 11 survivors in motels around the area at one time – many forced to stay multiple weeks while we tried to find affordable housing. Flexible funding was a godsend for survivors!

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 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.

Passage of SB 271-1 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.

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.

Housing instability affects the most vulnerable in our communities: 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.

Thank you for your work.



Julie Weismann, CEO