



Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force

Testimony in support of HB 2004A
Senate Committee On Human Services
Submitted by: Michele Roland-Schwartz, Executive Director
May 2, 2017

Chair Gelser, Vice Chair Olsen, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force (SATF), **I am submitting this letter in support of HB 2004A**, which will **alleviate some of the disproportionate burden on victims of sexual assault**¹.

The Sexual Assault Task Force is a private, non-profit, non-governmental statewide agency with over 100 multi-disciplinary members who serve as advisors on 1 of 8 subcommittees including: Campus, Criminal Justice, Legislative & Public Policy, Medical-Forensic, Men's Engagement, Offender Management, Prevention Education, and Victim Response.

Our mission is to facilitate and support a collaborative, survivor-centered approach to the prevention of, and response to sexual violence. We accomplish our mission by providing multi-disciplinary training and technical assistance to sexual assault responders in Oregon and nationally.

People who experience homelessness also experience high levels of sexual violence. This is particularly true for women, people of color, and LGBTQ youth who experience disproportionately higher rates of violence². The precarious nature of housing instability, caused by drastic rent increases and no cause evictions, increases the likelihood of sexual violence. Victims are more likely to experience sexual violence perpetrated by someone they know; and for homeless women and youth, this is typically by someone they go to for help. This is often in the form of forced, coerced, or manipulated sexual activity in exchange for survival, such as access to a shower, a couch to sleep on, or food and other life-saving needs. Perpetrators choose victims based on their vulnerability, their accessibility, and their perceived lack of credibility – and these are often the same individuals who experience increased barriers to reporting and access to services. This is particularly troubling in Oregon, where sexual violence against women is the second highest in the country (after Alaska).³

¹ Downing, J. and Roland-Schwartz M., Statesman Journal Guest Opinion: Housing Stability Reduces Domestic and Sexual Violence (2017):

<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/opinion/readers/2017/04/03/housing-stability-reduces-domestic-and-sexual-violence/99987996/>

² Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization— National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, United States, 2011: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/summaryreports.html>

³ ibid

Loss of housing is a precipitating factor for higher levels of psychological distress, including post-traumatic stress disorder⁴, compounding the trauma experienced when an incident of violence occurs. The chaos of homelessness, coupled with a traumatic event of sexual assault means victims are at an increased risk for mental health problems, including substance abuse, depression, and suicide attempts. This psychological distress compromises their ability to regain residential stability and realize an increased quality of life.

Passage and implementation of HB 2004A would provide protection for the most vulnerable in our community, and reduce the rates of sexual violence experienced as a result of housing instability caused by rent increases and evictions. For these reasons, we urge your support of HB 2004A.

⁴ Surviving Sexual Violence on the Streets: A Know-Your-Rights Film for Homeless Women. Victim Rights Law Center. <https://www.victimrights.org/surviving-sexual-violence-streets>