

TO: House Committee on Rules
FROM: Sara Brennan, Operations Manager
Center for Hope & Safety
DATE: May 24, 2017
RE: Support for HB 3078 (with -2 amendment), The Safety and Savings Act

Center for HOPE & SAFETY



Formerly Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service

Chair Williamson, Vice Chairs McLane and Rayfield, and members of the committee,

My name is Sara Brennan. I am the Operations Manager at the Center for Hope & Safety, and am here on the organization's behalf to support the Safety and Savings Act (HB 3078) with the -2 amendment.

Our agency has worked with victims of domestic and sexual violence since 1973, and I personally have been an advocate for survivors for more than a dozen years.

While our program primarily serves Marion county, we have worked with women at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF). All of the women we worked with at CCCF were incarcerated because of crimes that were caused by one of three reasons:

1. instigated by an abusive partner;
2. driven by an addiction instigated, or encouraged, by an abusive partner; or
3. driven by an addiction used as a coping mechanism while surviving abuse.

We worked at CCCF because of the high rate of women there who are survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The women we worked with at CCCF were all mothers and their children served as a key motivator as they worked to turn their lives around.

The Center for Hope & Safety support the Safety and Savings Act to fix gaps in the Family Sentencing Alternative program, address the drug and property crime laws that disproportionately send women to prison, and invest in services that create safer communities and strong families. While the Family Sentencing Alternative has met some of its intended goals, gaps in the law unintentionally exclude parents who would otherwise be eligible for the program. HB 3078 updates the program to include pregnant women and ensures it is being used to divert parents safely from prison to community supervision, keeping families together for better outcomes and reducing the State's budget deficit.

This bill will allow additional qualified parents to be reunited with their families while receiving intensive supervision and community-based treatment. We need to fix the loophole that excludes pregnant women. Expectant mothers were inadvertently excluded from the 2015 law. This update allows pregnant women to be considered for FSAP eligibility, giving newborns a chance to bond with their parents.

As the Operations Manager, I am responsible for all of our agency's bookkeeping and can tell you firsthand how important the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services (ODSVS) and Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) Funds are to our agency. In the last couple of years, JRI funds have allowed us to hire two new, key positions:

- Bilingual Court Advocate who is at our local courthouse nearly every day to help survivors with protective orders and support them through court proceedings
- Children's Advocate who works with the children who stay in our safe house shelter, as well as children whose parents meet with our advocates or attend our support groups.

Even with these additional staff members, we still feel sorely understaffed to meet the demand for our services. Increases to the ODSVS or JRI funding would create new advocate positions at our agency and others across the state. These jobs are vital to providing survivors the support they need to recognize the cycle of abuse and understand the resources available for them to leave the relationship and rebuild a life free of violence.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. On behalf of women and mothers in Oregon, I ask your support for The Safety and Savings Act (HB 3078), and I urge the Committee to move this bill forward.

605 Center St NE • Salem, OR 97301 • hopeandsafety.org
503-378-1572 office • 503-399-7722 hotline

because everyone deserves a life free of violence

