

April 30, 2019

Good morning Chair Prozanski and Esteemed Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary:

For the record my name is Dr. Leilani Sabzalian. Thank you for hearing my comments today in support of HB 2625.

In the sobering 2017 report, “Count Her In: A Report About Women and Girls in Oregon,” **Violence Against Women and Systemic Racism** were two of the 8 issues in the report “That Can’t Wait.” Indigenous women are multiply marginalized. As women, we are vulnerable to the violence that too many women in our state and nation face. We are among the 1 million Oregon women and girls that have experienced sexual or domestic violence, one of the highest rates in the country. As Indigenous peoples, we also experience racial and colonial oppression specifically. As the “Count Her In” Report shows, Native women experience “disproportionate barriers to success, including poverty rates that are nearly twice as high as those of white women and girls.”

When your community represents less than 2% of the state population, it often frustrating, even feels futile, to convince the broader public that your experiences and issues matter. This is why I am so appreciative of Representative Sanchez who has co-sponsored and championed this bill, and of all of those, including Senators Hansell, Riley, and Roblan among others, who have shown support for this Act.

My hope is that each of you supports this bill; that you stand in solidarity with and take an explicit stance for the safety, health and well-being of Indigenous women. Listening to the courageous stories of violence shared with you by survivors comes with responsibilities. I hope you heard these stories, take the responsibility that comes with hearing them seriously, and support the need for justice and healing in our communities and society.

Because I am hopeful that each of you will be on the right side of this historical moment, I wish to comment on the enactment of this law should it pass. In response to inquiries for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada, a collective of grassroots organizations—Families of Sister in Spirit, No More Silence, and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network—wrote that public inquiries allow “the Canadian state to *appear* that it is doing something about violence against women *without ever having to actually do anything*.” They continued, “We have seen less change and improvement from these government initiatives than what is coming from community-based responses. (<http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/march142014.pdf>)

I do not offer these words as criticism, but as instruction in hopes that once this bill passes, those working on implementation will take seriously the responsibilities that accompany this mandate and the calls for consultation written within it. *I strongly support this bill*, but I want to recognize that when the state itself has been the cause of so much violence, the state must be transparent, thoughtful, reflective, and accountable when proposing itself as the solution. Resisting and redressing colonial violence within a system that has perpetuated such violence is a challenge, but by cultivating relationships and sharing decision making power with respect to reporting,

identifying, investigating, and responding to cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women in the state, I am hopeful. I hope too that such efforts will lead to meaningful partnerships and that the state will support grassroots organizations who have been working on this issue for decades.

As grassroots organizations working to combat violence against First Nations women in Canada have said, “Where we have seen success has been in engagement with people on the front-lines and in our communities who live these realities everyday and seek change. This is where we draw our strength.” They continued,

...we have the answers and solutions. We always have. We are the experts in enacting those solutions too. Collaboratively we are interested in nurturing self-determined and community-led solutions to interpersonal and structural violence. This is where our hearts are; in resistance to colonialism and in fostering our solutions as Indigenous peoples with the support and consensual allyship of our non-Indigenous friends and family members in the struggle. (<http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/march142014.pdf>)

I hope as this law is enacted, those involved take these lessons to heart.

As an Alutiiq woman, I want to thank those who amended the bill to specifically include Alaska Native women. Language matters. I hope that the term “women” within the bill is also inclusive of queer, Two Spirit, and trans women. Further, I hope to one day see a version of this bill that is funded.

I am grateful for each and every one of you for considering and hopefully supporting this bill.

Quyanaa,

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[title for identification purposes]