



**Oregon Coalition**  
*Against Domestic & Sexual Violence*

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services  
Committee on Education and Labor  
U.S. House of Representatives

March 22, 2021

Hearing on *“Ending the Cycle: Examining Ways to Prevent Domestic Violence and Promote Healthy Communities”*

Chairwoman Bonamici, Ranking Member Fulcher and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on “Ending the Cycle: Examining Ways to Prevent Domestic Violence and Promote Healthy Communities.” I am honored to address the Subcommittee on behalf of domestic violence survivors.

My name is Vanessa Timmons, Executive Director of the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (OCADSV). I have been working in the movement to end domestic and sexual violence for more than 30 years and have been the OCADSV Executive Director for the past 8 years. I am a current board member of the National Network to End Domestic violence, which represents the 56 state and U.S. territory domestic violence coalitions, including OCADSV, at the federal level. I hope to speak on behalf of not only our 51 member programs in Oregon, but also on behalf of my colleagues across the country and on behalf of the survivors that we serve.

Unfortunately, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men are survivors of domestic violence.<sup>1</sup> This means all of us know someone who has been impacted by intimate partner violence. No one in our country escapes the impact of this public health crisis. Intimate partner violence is a public health issue, which requires a holistic public health response.

Over 1,600 community-based domestic violence programs offer services such as emergency shelter, counseling, legal assistance, and preventative education to millions of adult and child victims every year. These programs rely on the consistent funding provided by the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, also referred to as FVPSA. FVPSA expired in 2015 and must be reauthorized with key enhancements to increase the funding authorization level, expand support for and access to culturally-specific programs, strengthen the capacity of Indian tribes, and meaningfully invest in prevention, in order to meet the intersecting crises of the moment.

Since its passage in 1984, FVPSA has remained the sole federal funding source for domestic violence shelters and local domestic violence programs. For over three decades FVPSA has been the lifeblood of domestic violence programs, providing a stable, modest funding source to ensure lights are on and doors remain open. In

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Oregon, these funds maintain culturally specific services, services for survivors living on Tribal lands, and survivors living in rural, frontier and urban settings.

FVPSA also provides dedicated funding to domestic violence coalitions in every state and U.S. territory. Domestic violence coalitions provide support, technical assistance and training to local programs that support survivors. Coalitions are important because we bring the bird's-eye view of the field while the programs are in the day-to-day. Every coalition is slightly different; we all meet our programs where they are in the moment. In Oregon, we provide training for advocates who deliver direct services for survivors of domestic violence. We work closely with our state government agencies to ensure funding is getting into each community in Oregon in order to strengthen the safety net.

Despite the progress and success brought by FVPSA, programs are underfunded and struggle to keep up with the demand for services. According to the National Network to End Domestic Violence's forthcoming *15th Annual Domestic Violence Counts Report*, over 1,600 domestic violence programs across the country served 76,525 victims in just one day of 2020. Sadly, in that same day, over 11,000 requests for services went unmet due to a lack of resources. Approximately 57 percent of these unmet requests were for housing or emergency shelter.<sup>2</sup> For those individuals who were not able to find safety that day, the consequences can be dire including continued exposure to life-threatening violence or homelessness.

The single largest reason survivors stay in an abusive home is that they risk becoming houseless and turned away if a shelter is unable to meet their needs. Domestic violence is the number one cause of homelessness in women. Being unable to meet the needs of domestic violence victims leaves them little other choice but to stay or return to a dangerous location.

FVPSA reauthorization should not only reauthorize core domestic violence programs, but should also provide key enhancements to address the critical needs during this time. The historically bipartisan FVPSA reauthorization bill should increase authorization levels to address inadequate federal funding for direct services across the country in order to help providers maintain core staff and keep the doors open. It should strengthen the capacity of Indian tribes to exercise their sovereign authority to more fully respond to domestic violence in their communities and authorize funding for tribal coalitions. It should also address the unique needs of survivors in underserved and historically marginalized communities by expanding support for and access to culturally-specific programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected victims of domestic violence and exacerbated their urgent needs. Stay-at-home orders, quarantines, and the lack of privacy inherent in the home has created additional barriers to safety and access to services. Families are struggling or unable to meet basic needs, such as food and rent, which impacts the ability of survivors to engage in services. In rural, frontier and densely populated urban areas, lack of internet access and strained Wi-Fi connection due to multiple people online are also barriers to engagement.

Black, Indigenous, and other survivors of color have always faced increased barriers to safety, such as systemic racism and historical trauma. The pandemic has exacerbated

those barriers and highlighted the need for culturally-specific organizations who are better equipped to address the complex, multi-layered challenges facing victims from racial and ethnic minority populations as they seek services and protections from abuse.

The lack of resources and severity of violence is often heightened for survivors living at the margins, such as those living in rural communities, individuals with disabilities, older adults, and others. These underserved populations are often reluctant to seek assistance, and when they do, they frequently look for services and support in their immediate communities. In Oregon, OCADSV has worked with the disability response team as well as a statewide deaf and hard of hearing program. These underserved communities are impacted by violence at greater rates. FVPSA reauthorization bill should address the needs of these survivors.

The FVPSA reauthorization bill should also meaningfully invest in prevention by bringing evidence-informed, community-based prevention initiatives to more states and local communities across the country to address the underlying causes of domestic violence in order to stop abuse before it starts.

The reauthorization of FVPSA provides an important opportunity to continue the progress we have made toward meeting the needs of domestic violence victims and breaking the cycle of violence affecting our children, families and communities. Our nation depends on FVPSA-funded programs to meet the immediate, urgent and long-term needs of victims of domestic violence and their children.

Finally, I want to speak specifically to the need for the Pregnancy Assistance Fund (PAF). Adolescent mothers who experience physical abuse within three months after delivery are twice as likely to have a repeat pregnancy within 24 months. Twenty-two percent of adult female victims of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, first experience some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age.

In 2013, Oregon was awarded a four-year Pregnancy Assistance Fund (PAF) grant to support expectant and parenting teens, women, fathers, and families. The Oregon Coalition collaborated with the Oregon Department of Justice on what we called the 'Safer Futures' project.<sup>3</sup> Safer Futures funded seven sites across Oregon. One site was Peace at Home,<sup>4</sup> in Roseburg, one of our rural communities. Peace at Home's focus was to serve women who accessed public health departments and local health care clinics. The domestic violence advocates provided referrals to community resources, safety planning, legal and court advocacy, assistance with housing and employment, transportation, and/or obtaining health insurance and care, and relationship safety assessment and education.

Victims' needs are great and there is much to do to end domestic violence in this country. In order to move closer to this goal, I urge the Committee to prioritize the swift reauthorization of The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act with key enhancements to increase the funding authorization level, expand support for and access to culturally-specific programs, strengthen the capacity of Indian tribes, address the needs of underserved communities, and meaningfully invest in prevention. Thank you for your time.

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- <sup>1</sup> Center for Disease Control. *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey Summary Report (2015)* available at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/2015data-brief508.pdf>.
- <sup>2</sup> The National Network to End Domestic Violence. *15th Annual Domestic Violence Counts Report: A 24-hour census of domestic violence shelters and services across the United States.* (Forthcoming). For prior reports along with state and U.S. territory summaries see <https://nnedv.org/about-us/dv-counts-census/>.
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. Supporting Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence grant programs available at <https://opa.hhs.gov/grant-programs/pregnancy-assistance-fund-paf/paf-successful-strategies/supporting-survivors>.
- <sup>4</sup> Peace at Home <https://peaceathome.com/services/>.