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NEWS RELEASE

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COURTNEY INTRODUCES MEASURE TO BETTER PROTECT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS

(SALEM) – Senate President Peter Courtney has introduced legislation to better protect victims of domestic abuse by putting more teeth in the enforcement of restraining orders.

“This bill is about changing domestic violence victims into survivors,” Courtney said Thursday morning in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee. “We are facing a domestic violence death nearly once a month here in Oregon. It’s an epidemic and we need to do something about it.”

Senate Bill 3 increases the penalty for violating a Family Abuse Prevention restraining order, if there is clear risk of physical injury, to a Class C felony. Currently, the punishment for violating a restraining order ranges from a simple contempt of court charge to a misdemeanor. Courtney’s measure would give judges the ability to make violations punishable by up to five years imprisonment, a \$125,000 fine, or both.

Courtney told members of the Judiciary Committee the story of Cassandra Wagner. In July 2014, the Silverton woman filed a restraining order against her ex-boyfriend. Forty days later she was dead. On Aug. 4, police say, the ex-boyfriend violated the restraining order, and was given a 90-day probation. He was then set free on work release on Aug. 17. Less than two weeks later, authorities say he shot and killed Cassandra Wagner.

The Senate President also told committee members the stories of Jessie Cavett and Nicolette Ellis, who police allege were both murdered by their husbands in 2014 despite previous violations of restraining orders by each man

Courtney explained that last year 557 people applied for restraining orders in Marion County alone. There were 361 violations. Every single one of those violations was at most a misdemeanor, and at least a contempt of court charge.

“Judges hands are tied. The law lets dangerous violators walk away with nothing more than a contempt of court charge,” Courtney said. “We must give judges the discretion to treat restraining order violations as the serious crime they are.”