



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 10, 2025

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True Justice in Domestic Violence Cases Requires Courts Learn About Abuse Dynamics

Bipartisan bill passes Oregon Senate that requires judges get training to better protect children and survivors of abuse

SALEM, OR – Survivors of sexual assault deserve a court experience of protection, not further harm. A measure passed by the Oregon Senate today requires that judges learn to recognize abuse dynamics, handle cases with sensitivity, and make genuinely informed decisions in complex cases.

“Survivors and their children enter courtrooms seeking safety and justice, yet too often face a judicial system that may not fully understand the complexities of family violence, coercive control, and trauma,” says Rachel Schutz, executive director of the Family Justice Center of Washington County. “When our judiciary is better informed, survivors are better protected, and justice is better served.”

Senate Bill 710 requires that state training for judges covers verified, meaningful information on sexual assault, stalking, and other matters related to interpersonal violence.

“This is a critical area for training of judges,” Baker County Circuit Court Judge Matt Shirtcliff said at the legislation’s public hearing before the Committee on Judiciary. “I’m from a small jurisdiction, but primarily the homicides I dealt with were domestic violence homicides. These are critical cases that have to be handled correctly. The only way I see that happening is with statewide training on an advanced level.”

Chief sponsors of the bill **Senator Janeen Sollman (D – Forest Grove)** and **Senator Suzanne Weber (R – North Coast)** underscored the importance of the training.

“As a Senator and a board member of the Family Justice Center of Washington County, I have heard from numerous advocates and survivors that improvements to the family court system are much needed,” said **Senator Sollman**. “In order to protect children and survivors of abuse and domestic violence, we must have better training and awareness for our judges all across Oregon, it can have dire consequences if they do not have this trauma-informed training.”

“Often a child who comes to court in a domestic violence case has experienced unimaginable trauma,” **Senator Weber** told her colleagues before the vote. “There is nothing more damaging than having a judge who does not make the right decisions for them, even if only out of ignorance.”

The bill gives Oregon’s Chief Justice of the Supreme Court responsibility for setting continuing education requirements, but Judge Shirtcliff pictured a substantial commitment.

“Over the first two or three years on the bench we should be required to receive a weeklong advanced training on these issues: domestic violence, sexual assault dynamics, the science of it, so that we have this knowledge,” the judge said at the February hearing.

Today’s vote was unanimous to advance SB 710 to the Oregon House of Representatives.

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