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## **Lawmakers to Hear Bill in Olympia Tuesday to Increase Protections for Sexual Assault Victims**

**OLYMPIA, Washington** - Legislation to create equal protection for victims of sexual assault in the state of Washington with changes to the Sexual Assault Protection Order (SAPO) will be heard Tuesday, in the House Judiciary Committee at 10:00 AM. Senate Bill 5256, sponsored by Senator Joe Fain (R-47<sup>th</sup>) passed the Senate by a vote of 43-6 earlier this month, while a companion bill, House Bill 1384, sponsored by Representative Roger Goodman (D-45<sup>th</sup>) passed the House 76-21 in February.

The bill would allow courts to grant protection orders for a fixed duration, even permanently, instead of the current maximum of two years. It also reduces burdens to renew existing orders. These changes will make SAPOs consistent with protections available to domestic violence, stalking, and harassment victims.

Once a sexual assault protection order is in place, it requires the respondent to stay away from the victim and place(s) that the victim frequents (home, work, school, etc.), and to have no further direct or indirect contact with the victim. Sexual assault protection orders are available for victims of sexual assault who fear their attackers, even if no charges are filed.

This is significant because for two key reasons: in a five-year review of cases filed in King County, criminal charges were filed in fewer than 25% of reported cases at the time when a victim sought a SAPO in King County; and in King County Superior Court in the past five years, fewer than half of the SAPO petitions filed resulted in the entry of a protection order.

“This bill means that victims of sexual assault will have the same protection as other victims,” said Mary Ellen Stone, executive director of the King County Sexual Assault Resource Center. “A SAPO, however, can be difficult to obtain, even though it’s often the only protection for a victim in cases where charges aren’t filed.

Violation of a protection order can result in criminal charges against the attacker.

In 2015, Washington state programs served approximately 13,000 victims of sexual assault, with about 5,000 of those victims in King County.

[King County Sexual Assault Resource Center \(KCSARC\)](#) founded in 1976, is a non-profit organization that ensures all people affected by sexual violence and abuse get the treatment they need and the advocacy they deserve. KCSARC is at the forefront of change, guiding public policy development and delivering research-based education to create safer environments for everyone.