



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS PROTECTED BY NEW LAW

*HB1322 Takes Effect Today, TESSA Applauds Bill Protecting Victims' Confidentiality*

**COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.** – Domestic violence victims in Colorado now have the right to make decisions about the help and services they receive.

Colorado was one of the few states that required doctors to report all domestic violence injuries to law enforcement, regardless of their patients' wishes. As HB1322 takes effect today, those laws will contain important exceptions. Doctors will no longer be required to report these injuries in some situations, taking into consideration the sensitive nature of a victim coming forward about what has happened to them.

“One of the most important things to remember when working with victims of domestic violence is that only they fully understand their situation,” said TESSA Executive Director SherryLynn Boyles. “Only a victim will know whether or not their abuser would be likely to retaliate if law enforcement gets involved. This new law acknowledges that, meaning victims can seek the healthcare services they need with less fear of retribution.”

Under HB1322, doctors are not required to report injuries believed to be the result of domestic violence if the patient is between 18 and 70 years old, is not an at-risk adult, and has indicated their preference that the injury not be reported. However, doctors will still need to report injuries resulting from gun shots, stabbings, and other incidents resulting in serious bodily injury.

TESSA is optimistic that this will eliminate some of the unintended consequences of well-intended reporting laws.

“Reporting violence is not the end of a victim's situation, it is the first step in creating a supportive criminal justice response and the beginning of a long recovery process,” Boyles said. “Victims need to be able to receive health care for their injuries while maintaining the autonomy to decide what they need and when they need it. HB1322 will accomplish just that for many victims.”

Regardless of whether a victim's injury is reported, HB1322 requires doctors to either refer patients to a confidential victim's advocate, like the advocates at TESSA, or the doctor can simply provide a victim with information about available services. TESSA is able to provide brochures to doctors and hospitals upon request. However, the suggested best practice would be to help a victim call TESSA's 24/7, completely confidential hotline at 719-633-3819 to speak directly to an advocate.

*TESSA serves 10,000 victims of domestic and sexual violence in El Paso and Teller Counties each year, and also works within the community to end the violence.*

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