

03/27/2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Amanda Evans. I am a long-time resident of Waldo County and an advocate for Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine.

I am submitting testimony in support of LD 566, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

Before I took on the role of an advocate, I didn't understand how complex and unique this role was. My interaction with and the role that I play is completely different for each person I am in contact with. For some survivors I am the person who helps them navigate a complex legal system. For others I am that person that comes to their school and talks to them about personal space and consent. I've been the only support someone had when they were feeling vulnerable and alone during a forensic exam after being sexually assaulted. I am the person that a mother is able to call and cry to when she is blaming herself for what has happened to her child. I am the listening ear on the other end of the line when a survivor calls and doesn't know what to say or do, but they need to be heard. For the officer that is doing their job and understands that a survivor needs more support, I am the "more support". For a survivor sitting in a full court room across from their abuser, I am a familiar face, I am a physical shield from the eyes of that person, I am a safe person to cry in front of, I am support for them. I am a lot of things all at once, each and every day.

Not only am I an advocate, I am a single mom, without family or financial supports, living paycheck to paycheck. I am working full time, I am taking extra on-call shifts, I am doing all that I can, yet I cannot afford to live. I sit up at night crying because I am so overwhelmed by the disconnection notices, the compounding debt, the fear that I am one small financial inconvenience away from homelessness, losing my vehicle, not being able to provide for my children, or provide for myself. I am not in this line of work to get rich. I am an advocate because I feel strongly about the work that I do. However, I need to be able to survive on my income and at this point I cannot. While I see so much value in the differences that we make, it just isn't an option to continue living this way. If wages are not increased to a livable wage, I will not be able to continue in this position.

Thank you for you listening and for your support. My hope is that you will vote in favor of the bill, not only for the advocates, but for all of the people out there whose lives we impact.