

March 27, 2023

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

My name is Gabrielle Cooper, I work in Hancock and Washington counties, and I am submitting testimony on behalf of Aroostook Mental Health Center Sexual Assault Services. I am writing to express my **support of LD 566, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.**

I am a proud Mainer, born and raised in Kennebec County. I left the state to attend college and graduate school but was eager to return after my education. In my job application process, I turned down offers to work elsewhere in the U.S. for more money in order to enter a line of work that I felt passionate about in a state that I love. I want to continue living and working in Maine and this funding bill would make it possible for me to do so. Young people like myself cannot stay in this field with rising costs of living. I believe that this bill is an important part of ensuring that young people stay in Maine and stay in this line of work, which increases the stability and quality of these services.

I am an advocate because I love my job and I feel passionate about preventing and responding to sexual violence. In college, I served on several committees dedicated to preventing campus sexual violence and established a training and awareness program for student leaders. After graduation, I knew I wanted to use my knowledge and experience to help other Mainers. If I was only motivated by money, I would not be at my current job. This is important, vital work and it needs to be compensated as such.

I wholeheartedly believe that current salaries do not equate to the difficulty of this work. While I find my job incredibly rewarding, it also requires a great deal of time, energy, and emotional labor. Survivors deserve access to sustainable, well-funded, and fully staffed sexual assault programs. This increased funding would make it possible for advocates to stay in this work for longer as it will be adequately compensated.

When advocates are taken care of, we are able to best serve the people we work with. I thank you all for your dedication to Maine and its residents and your support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle Cooper