

LD 566

An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee – My name is John Crowley and I'm the Vice President of the Board of Trustees for the Sisters in Arms Center in Augusta. I'm writing in support of LD 566 "An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services". The Sisters in Arms Center provides transitional housing and support services for female veterans and their children.

Over the last six years, the Sisters in Arms Center has provided shelter for over 50 veterans, 10 of their children, and a myriad of pets. All these women have different stories, but some common themes among them are military sexual trauma (MST), substance use disorder, and mental health. In one case, our Executive Director was called at 10:00 in the evening during a snowstorm to provide safe shelter to a female veteran who had been thrown out of the house during a domestic violence assault and dropped off at the town hall. That veteran stayed with us for 10 months before moving to a different program that provided mental health support and job training.

While 50 is a large number for one small organization, there are many others who we have not been able to help, due to a lack of funding. Because we are a mostly volunteer organization, we often can't provide sufficient support for the more vulnerable veterans in the community. Our veterans tend to be those who can function in a congregate housing situation while getting support from those other veterans living with them. Too often we have women veterans who need counseling, transportation, or daily supervision that we could only provide with full time staff. The funding proposed in LD 566 would enable the Sisters in Arms Center to build infrastructure, expand support groups for survivors of MST, and formalize our survivors peer support networks. We know the need, because we know who we have had to turn away. When possible, we work with other agencies to assist those women, but we know that many of them drop out of the system and go back to the abusive relationships that they were in before, just to put a roof over their kid's heads.

I urge you to vote in favor of LD 566.

John Crowley