

January 23, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Erin K Flood and I am a resident of Portland, I am also the Executive Director of Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine. Every one of us at SARSSM is an Advocate. I have worked in the anti-violence field, providing support and services to survivors, for over 25 years in a multitude of states. I am also a survivor.

I am submitting testimony in support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.

As Executive Director, I have a broad view of the work Sexual Assault Advocates and our multidisciplinary partners perform in service of victims and survivors of crime. I am able to see the path towards healing, empowerment, and restoration that victims and survivors journey on with the support of our team and partners. It is an honor to play a part in this life changing process.

And because of the role I hold, as Executive Director, I am acutely aware of how funding shortages create staffing shortages, which in turn increase barriers to service provision, resulting in less positive outcomes for the people who turn to us in their time of need.

SARSSM's Advocates are folks who *make do*: they are the people accompanying a victim to a forensic medical exam after an assault at 3 am on a snowy Monday, the Prevention Educator teaching a group of 6 year olds what boundaries are and that they can have theirs, the Helpline Advocate, who, after being an empathetic source of support for one caller, takes the next call with a somehow restored well of empathy for the next.

Recently, I represented SARSSM when we tabled at the *Deaf Culture Festival* on Mackworth Island with MECASA. Our table had so much action! So many people came by to tell us how important we were to the community there and at large. At one point, a young adult, not hearing impaired, but with developmental disabilities, stopped. They pointed at our SARSSM sign and exclaimed, "I know you!" they paused. Then they said, "I was raped". My MECASA partner and I both responded, "I am sorry this happened to you. Did you get the help you needed?" They emphatically exclaimed "yes!", smiled at us, their friend and aid, and went happily to the next table. They had received the support they needed, when then needed it, and were living in their empowerment.

THIS. This person reflects our *why, what, where* and *when*. VOCA funding is our *how*.

An over 60% cut to funding will devastate victim service providers without a doubt. We will do what we can to *make do*, but it's folks like the young person I wrote about who will feel it the most. In a state that is experiencing exponential population growth, we can expect to see the rates of sexual violence continue to rise rather than lessen. Our services and the people that provide them will certainly be needed more than ever.

Please support LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.

Thank you.