

January 23, 2024

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

My name is Meg Hatch and I am the Executive Director of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services (SAPARS). I am submitting testimony in support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.

SAPARS provides critical support services for people who have experienced sexual violence in Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford Counties and the towns of Bridgton and Harrison. We are also the umbrella agency for the Children's Advocacy Center of Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford Counties. If we were to see a 60% cut in VOCA funding we would need to lay off almost half of our staff and it would devastate our programming. We would no longer be able to provide the critical and comprehensive support services survivors count on in our communities. It would be nearly impossible for us to continue to staff our 24/7 helpline, support survivors in reporting to law enforcement, provide advocacy at the hospital during medical forensic exams, help navigate a protection from abuse process in civil court, or run support groups. Children who have experienced sexual abuse and other forms of child abuse and neglect wouldn't have access to the wraparound, multidisciplinary team services offered at our Children's Advocacy Center. I have no doubt that we would see an increase in serious mental health crises, substance use/abuse, and suicidality in our communities.

Not only would this funding cut our programming at SAPARS, but the impact it would have on survivors being able to access the network of support services we have built in the state of Maine over the past few decades would be catastrophic. There is not one agency that can provide the full range of services that survivors need. We frequently collaborate with our domestic violence resource center, Safe Voices, Pine Tree Legal attorneys, Legal Services for the Elderly, Victim Witness Advocates at the District Attorney's Office, and Victim advocates at the Department of Corrections, all of whom are also funded by VOCA.

We urge you and your colleagues to support LD 2084 so that we can continue to provide the high quality, comprehensive support services to people in our communities who have experienced interpersonal violence.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Meg Hatch