

January 11, 2024

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

My name is Lynn Sterling, and I am a resident of Portland, Maine.

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

I am the Advocacy Services Program Manager at Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine. My team consists of myself and two SART Advocates who provide systems advocacy for Cumberland and York County.

In addition to the 24/7 Helpline, SART Advocates work directly with victims/survivors of sexual violence. We validate their experiences by believing them and we help them navigate the complex systems that are involved in getting through medical and civil/criminal systems.

In the past fiscal year, we had 696 clients who called the helpline seeking support and systems help. Advocates were present for hospital accompaniments, court accompaniments for criminal and civil legal issues related to sexual assault, in person appointments with incarcerated individuals, police accompaniments, and made many referrals to legal resources and to other community partners, including Domestic Violence centers, housing resources, food banks, and detox centers.

- We recently helped a woman who was being stalked with safety planning, and an advocate worked with community partners to find her safe housing.
- We have helped a mother of a young child get a PFA against the offender who caused harm, for this client I reached out to our York County DV organization, and they provided legal support.
- An advocate accompanied a client to make a police report because she was being sexually harassed in her workplace.
- We have provided much needed support to help a trafficking survivor rebuild her life in a new safe apartment and provided help with car repairs so that she could find work. This individual is working on reunification with her children and the support she has received from SARSSM is truly life changing.

These individuals have all been victims of violence and they are using our support to navigate systems that help them regain some control over their lives. We could not do this work without the grant funds that allow us to advocate for the individuals who ask for help. If VOCA funds are cut, we will not have the capacity to support clients as needed

Thank you for listening, I ask that you support our work and vote in favor of the bill.

Sincerely,

Lynn Sterling

Advocacy Services Program Manager- SARSSM