

January 23, 2024

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

My name is Melissa Martin, Policy and Legal Director at MECASA, and I am sharing this testimony on behalf of one of our member center advocates today, who, because of the sensitivity of her story, would prefer to remain anonymous. The following are her words in support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.

“Are you familiar with the concept of a wounded healer? Wounded healers are people whose own trauma motivates them to be a healer. A therapist. A case manager. An advocate. This was my path to advocacy. As I write this, I am going through the process of separating from my partner—and I have needed help from the whole spectrum of advocacy services, from domestic violence to sexual violence to legal supports, because, as it happens, there were elements of domestic violence in this relationship.

Years of my life uprooted, my future derailed, and constant fear and dread hanging over me—this has been a terrifying experience. But unlike many, I have it pretty good. I know how to navigate the system. I know who to reach out to and what to ask for. Yet despite all that, I’m still terrified to leave my house and of what he might do to me.

Let me reiterate: I have the knowledge and experience to make my path easier. I offer my story because the advocacy work I do is 50% funded by VOCA. I can’t help but think about everyone I serve who must navigate these systems, without their consent, without knowledge of all the moving parts or what happens next, and without the background to understand who to reach out to or where to find the resources they need. I think about the caregivers I sit with who, too, have just had years of their life uprooted, with a suddenly uncertain future facing themselves and the children they desperately want to protect.

Many times, I am the first—and only—person they can sit and cry in front of. Many times, I am the first person to slow down and walk alongside them. I am the first person to look beyond their victimization and ask: What do they need? Do they need food on the table first? What about a Protection from Abuse order for their children? Do they need support through that process, yet another overwhelming thing on their plate?

I can provide all these things and more. But I am 50% funded by VOCA, and the need for my services already stretches the resources we have to provide. Every caregiver deserves to have me sit with them; every caregiver deserves to not feel alone in this overwhelming, horrible process. What would happen to the caregivers who needed me the most, if I hadn’t seen them? No food on the table. The constant fear and dread. This persistent feeling of danger for both them and their children. Every caregiver deserves better.

Thank you for listening. I appreciate everyone’s time, as I appreciate your support and vote in favor of LD 2084.”