

January 23, 2024

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

My name is Stephanie Harmon and I am a resident of Farmington, Maine, and an educator/advocate for Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services.

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

I support survivors through prevention education in the community and public school systems (pre-k through 12th grade), University of Maine at Farmington, and as an advocate in person and through our 24-hour state helpline.

Our services in rural Maine are not just a need but an absolute necessity if we want to minimize harm to future generations. The rate of sexual abuse in rural counties (2.8 per 1,000 children) is twice the rate in major urban counties (1.4 children per 1,000)

[https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_interest/child\\_law/resources/child\\_law\\_practiceonline/child\\_law\\_practice/vol-34/march-2015/meeting-the-challenge-of-child-maltreatment-in-rural-areas](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/child_law_practice/vol-34/march-2015/meeting-the-challenge-of-child-maltreatment-in-rural-areas)

Let me share an example of why prevention education empowers children to advocate for themselves:

It was one winter afternoon when I was wrapping up lessons in one of the elementary schools that I serve. The discussion was about boundaries and sexual harassment. The lesson explains that sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual comment, joke, picture/ graffiti, name-calling, and touching, grabbing, or leering.

After class I was walking down the hall, only to be called back by a teacher who was jogging after me. They explained that one of the students had requested to speak with me. So, after finding a confidential space, this young student shared with me that they were a victim of repeated sexual harassment.

The student had never heard the term “sexual harassment” or been taught what it meant before that day. They had endured the leering, inappropriate grabs, and comments every gym class to the point of feeling bullied into wearing baggy clothes to school.

After I reassured them that they weren’t at fault for what was happening to them, we went to the Principal’s office together. The student asked me to go with them, for support in sharing this secret that they had held onto all school year.

If this conversation regarding boundaries, consent, and sexual harassment had never happened, this student may have never felt safe enough to speak up about the abuse they were enduring or understood that there were resources for them to call on. This is just one of many similar situations that I have witnessed working in this field. There are without a doubt other students like this one waiting to be seen, heard, and supported.

If these VOCA cuts happen, students like mine won't have a chance to learn about boundaries, consent, healthy relationships, and sexual assault, and won't have the language to speak up when they or someone they care about is victimized. The parents of the kids that I serve won't have someone to walk them through the Title IX process as they deal with the fact that their child is being sexually abused at school.

Without this funding, community partners like Pine Tree Legal won't be able to provide legal assistance during protection from abuse cases at no cost to survivors in an already struggling economy. Without funding for community partners like these, we will have far fewer resources to provide to survivors looking for justice and healing.

Please support and vote in favor of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes; so I can continue to advocate for the unheard young voices of Franklin County.

Thank you,  
Stephanie Harmon