

January 23, 2024

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

My name is Amanda Evans and I am submitting testimony on behalf of Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine.

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

The work we do as advocates is invaluable. The support we provide and the knowledge we share impacts not only survivors but the systems that support them. In our work with the courts, we take some of the heavy lifting off the court staff and the judges themselves. Through facilitating negotiation agreements, we lessen the number of hearings that need to be heard by the judge, while also ensuring the survivors leave with a sense of safety.

We support clients through the entirety of the criminal and/or civil process. That may mean being there with them for the forensic exam at the hospital, scheduling time for them to meet with law enforcement in a way that feels best for the survivor, then being that familiar face during that interview, providing them with a referral to a Pine Tree Legal attorney, and then supporting them at court as they file and attend hearings for protection from abuse orders and/or criminal hearings. Throughout all these processes, we also provide them with any emotional support, referrals, or information they need.

Navigating legal processes is challenging on a good day. We as advocates use our knowledge and expertise to navigate those systems with survivors and provide them with information throughout the process so they are able to make informed decisions. This makes things easier for the survivor, but also helps to give them back some control in a situation where that may have been taken from them.

Not all systems work together, or are even meant to work together. We as advocates are in a unique position where we are able to bring all of those systems together as needed to support a survivor. Whether that's a referral to PTLA or DRM, a call to law enforcement or a victim witness advocate, or safety planning with an entire team, we are able to bring those systems together for the benefit of the survivor and for a longer lasting benefit to our whole community.

Cutting our funding means cuts to services that we cannot afford to make. What we need are more advocates and more funding, not less. As we raise awareness about sexual violence, we continue to see more survivors reaching out for our support. Let's keep advocates staffed to meet the need and find ways to increase our ability to provide these services.

Thank you for considering what I have written as you make your decision. As an advocate this bill is near and dear to me. Please vote in favor of this bill, for the sake of any person who has ever experienced sexual violence, or who has loved someone who has.

Thank you,

Amanda Evans

Rural Services Coordinator SASSMM