

January 17, 2024

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

My name is Nicole Benoit and I am submitting testimony on behalf of Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine (SARSSM).

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

As a SART Advocate, I am in contact with survivors of sexual assault almost every day. Working with childhood abuse survivors coming forward as adults, trafficking survivors, or other victims of such violence, I see firsthand how detrimental sexual violence is to a person's overall wellbeing, and how it can stay with someone for a lifetime. The funds that VOCA provides aren't just about providing a bandaid to a temporary situation. This is funding that allows my clients to find healing and thrive in their life going forward. When we help cover the cost of legal counsel for a protective order that lets them feel safe in their living space, we allow them to sleep easier and be able to participate in work and community activities. When we provide a trafficking survivor supplemental housing funds so that they have an address to use to apply for jobs, they can start building a life free of sexual violence. Just being a voice on the other end of the phone, letting the survivor know they have support to make it through whatever challenge is coming their way can give that person the strength to begin healing.

A cut to this funding would impact any and all of the footholds that allow survivors to heal and thrive as a part of their community. I implore you to solve this coming crisis before it has a direct impact on all of the communities of Maine.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Please support survivors by voting in favor of LD 2084.

Thank You,
Nicole Benoit