

January 18, 2024

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

My name is Amie Dick and I am a resident of Bath, Maine.

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

For four years, I have served as the Program Coordinator and Forensic Interviewer for the Midcoast Children's Advocacy Center. MCAC staff are almost entirely funded by VOCA.

Our center supports children and their caregivers in Waldo, Knox, Lincoln, and Sagadahoc counties, and we have three locations in Searsport, Rockland, and Wiscasset. Since opening in 2017, MCAC has conducted over 706 Forensic Interviews of children; of those, I have personally conducted 415, while a multi-disciplinary team observes from another room. In this way, police detectives, DHHS case workers, and DA-representatives from District Attorney's offices can hear a child's narrative of sexual abuse at one time and work as a team on next steps. The child only needs to speak with one person, who is trained in trauma-informed, evidenced-based practices on-to elicit theing difficult details a child needs to convey. Just iIn the last legislative session, a new law was passed allowing Forensic Interviews conducted at CACs to be admissible in both criminal and civil court (LD 765). This is a huge win for children across the state, and has made the work we do even more vital for finding justice and accountability.

Forensic Interviews are not the only service we provide. While children are speaking with an interviewer, their caregiver is meeting with a Family Advocate, who can provide emotional support, psychoeducation on trauma and resilience, and connect the family with referrals to resources they otherwise would not have known have existed. Forensic Interviewers represent the CAC's goal of justice, while Family Advocates represent the CAC's goal of healing by, connecting families with mental health, medical, and civil legal services.

The upcoming VOCA cuts will hurt the Midcoast Children's Advocacy Center. Statewide, CACs will suffer as our staffing is reduced by more than half.

Fewer staff and less capacity means we cannot be responsive to the needs of investigators, who may decide to do interviews in the field without the same training or neutral location. This increases the possibility children will need to tell their story multiple times, and they will not have the opportunity to take advantage of the

admissibility law. It means we cannot be responsive to the needs of families who may or may not get referred to us, who are trying navigate many systems and make sense of how child sexual abuse has impacted their everyday lives.

Not only will these cuts disrupt CAC services, they will disrupt the no cost, multi-disciplinary services we rely on to meet the needs of families where we can't. This includes Pine Tree Legal Assistance, who ~~can~~ represent our clients at protection from abuse hearings while the criminal case is pending. This includes victim witness advocates, who support our clients once the case is accepted to prosecution and helps navigate the complicated legal world. This includes domestic violence and sexual assault advocates, who support our clients struggling with interpersonal violence, trying to live a life free from abuse.

Children in Maine deserve access to these services. Caregivers deserve access to these services, so they can protect their children.

Please vote in favor of LD 2084. Thank you.

Amie Dick