

January 19, 2024

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

My name is Sarah Wright, and I am submitting my testimony as a resident of Houlton Maine.

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

As an individual who has worked in Crisis Services, we often find ourselves partnered with sexual assault prevention, advocacy and CAC's, this partnership forms a safety net for individuals who have been Victims of Crimes. As you can imagine, being a Victim of a Crime can be a literal definition for needing support for crisis intervention. Without the support of this bill LD 2084, Crisis Services is at risk of losing our highly skilled and valued partners resulting in the continued shredding of the already friable safety net that exists for the behavioral health system.

Each of the roles represented in the Advocacy system from the sexual assault advocate, DV advocate, PTLA Lawyers, Victim witness advocate, CAC personnel - they all play a vital role in connecting with each Victim of Crime and meeting them on their specific journey of recovery. The system must work together to support individuals in regaining everything that was taken from them and for some of these victims that takes years of support just in our justice system to gain that recovery.

If funding was cut by over 60% for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes the need for these services will not simply just go away because the funding does not exist anymore. It will fall to an already overtaxed and understaffed mental health system, likely the crisis system which is drastically understaffed in the State of Maine, and we are not trained in advocacy. Prevention and swift intervention are key to reducing long term, chronic symptoms later in life as demonstrated through the ACES study. Without support for these services, we are contributing to continuing to overburden our already burdened Behavioral Health System. In not funding LD 2084, the People of Maine who in their most vulnerable moments that needed help will receive inadequate care and ultimately will be victimized again by a system that was ill equipped to support them.

I want to thank the committee for taking the time to read my testimony and I ask you to please support and vote in favor of LD 2084.