

January 23, 2024

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

My name is Julia Miller, and I am Program Director of one of Maine's sexual assault support centers. Today I am submitting testimony in support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes on behalf of a survivor and client who wishes to remain anonymous. Their testimony is as follows:

"I am writing regarding consideration of cutting Sexual Assault services. This is a vital service to both males and females, as little training is provided to police, as well as health care professionals. Sadly, mental health providers do not have the time, capacity, nor the ability to provide the excellent services to sexual assault survivors/victims that sexual assault advocates have.

I have utilized these services for many years and without them I would have been unable or have limited ability to receive the support and resources I needed. I have extensive trauma history and this program has gone above and beyond to help. Sadly, my interactions both with law enforcement as well as health care services has often added to my trauma, due to the lack of knowledge or unwillingness to educate themselves to the needs I had as a sexual abuse victim/ survivor.

I fear cutting this service could be detrimental to myself, as well as others. At times of crisis advocates have been available 24/7, 365 days a year, unlike my professional providers who are only reachable from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. They have made themselves available when other services could not be utilized. Mental health services have been so overwhelmed with other needs, providers are unable to meet the needs of sexual assault victims. Cutting the services would impact all, in so many ways, in an already overtaxed mental health system.

Advocates have assisted me in many ways: assisted with contacts with law enforcement, accompanied me to the E.R. and provided support I otherwise would not have had. The specialized training sexual assault advocates have has been vital to me instead of continual use of emergency services, which is costly to the state. Sexual assaults victims/survivors have needs that many with limited training are unable to provide whether is lack of time, limited resources, or lack of adequate knowledge in handling trauma. Should this service be cut many victims, including myself, would probably not be able to utilize medical or emotional support in a time of needing this service. I personally know how much substance abuse, alcoholism and other criminal behavior leads back to sexual abuse trauma or rape.

E.R.'s and courts utilize sexual assault advocates to assist with support to the victim making the victim feel supported and heard. I have had encounters with police in both positive and not so positive situations, the advocates were professional, respectful, and treated me with dignity. I am very grateful for the service and would be greatly impacted in an unhealthy manner, as would many other individuals utilizing the services, if these cuts happen. I know many

individuals who have utilized the service who have had only positive experience. This service benefits all citizens in many ways. This service is vital and without it, all areas of society would be impacted. The most likely to be significantly impacted would be the already overtaxed legal system, health care, and mental health services that are already unable to provide needed services to all those in need.”