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Testimony in Support of LD 2084: An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes

Greetings Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. I am Bridget Quinn, Associate State Director of Advocacy and Outreach for AARP Maine.

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. On behalf of our nearly 200,000 members statewide, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony. Today, I am sharing testimony in support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.

Elder abuse takes many forms. It can be financial, physical, psychological, or a combination of these. It can occur regardless of whether someone lives at home in the community or in an institutional setting. It is critical that when older Mainers, especially those of a low income, are the victim of a crime such as abuse that they have access to legal support and help. In 2022, Legal Services for the Elderly (LSE) supported 173 cases related to Elder Abuse.

Further, older adults who have a low income need to be able to access legal support when they need it. According to Legal Services for the Elderly, 56% of low-income older Mainers face a legal problem annually.¹ In 2022, LSE handled nearly 3,000 cases for older adult providing critical support to older adults in our community.

However, due to the drastic decline in the funding available for Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)², LSE could lack critical funding the program needs. According to DHHS's office of Child and Family Services in 2018 Maine received \$13,885,282 in VOCA funding but in 2021 the award was \$4,610,705.³ Demand for services that are funded through the program have not decreased creating a great strain on these critical programs.

¹ <https://mainelse.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/9.20.23%20Draft%202022%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

² <https://ovc.ojp.gov/about/crime-victims-fund/fy-2007-2024-cvf-balance.pdf>

³ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XtSYnt08Hjm9sFiSLubVDqOA6AqgYdXA/view>

Critical programs that utilize VOCA funding are at risk and therefore so are those that have utilizes their services. In 2023 Legal Services for the Elderly served 363 cases utilizing VOCA, the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine served 63 cases, and Pine Tree Legal served 521.

Currently DHHS, is funding the loss funding through remaining VOCA funds from previous years. This will not be able to continue contracts starting 10/1/24 as there will be no remaining funds. LD 2084 asks for critical investments that will continue to allow programs such as Legal Services for the Elderly, Pine Tree Legal, the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine and others provide support to Maine's most vulnerable older adults. We urge this committee to vote ought to pass on LD 2084.

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony. If you have questions for me I can be reached at bquinn@aarpp.org or at 207-272-8563.

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