



P.O. Box 704
Portland, ME 04104
Phone: (207) 767-4952
Fax: (207) 767-8109
Email: info@throughthesedoors.org
www.throughthesedoors.org

Testimony
In Support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of
Crime
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
January 23, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Rebecca Hobbs, and I am writing on behalf of Through These Doors, in support of LD 2084 and the need for funding to maintain essential victim services in Maine.

Through These Doors is Maine's domestic violence resource center in Cumberland County, the only holistic resource center for victims of domestic abuse. Incorporated in 1977, with a former name of Family Crisis Services and long-time Executive Director Lois Reckitt (recently deceased), TTD serves over 20% of the individuals in Maine who reach out for domestic violence assistance. Given our large city center and proximity to more populous regions in New England, we are in a position to serve a number of immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers that is significant by Maine standards.

You may be aware that over a period of years, DHHS regularly replaced other types of funding sources in our annual contract with federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA funds, making VOCA funding the most significant resource we have. Today, VOCA provides a bedrock of funding for all of our core direct services. Without VOCA funds, TTD's services to victims of abuse would be impaired to a devastating degree.

VOCA accounts for approximately 35% of our direct service budget and currently provides:

- Staff in our busiest office, our Portland Outreach Office, located in the Portland Police Dept. Even the three full-time advocates we have staffed there cannot fully meet the demand. Survivors who walk in for help are looking for support and safety planning; assistance with protection from abuse orders and family matters cases; referrals to pro-bono attorneys at Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project, Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project, and Legal Services for the Elderly, all of whom we have relationships with and who prioritize our referrals; connection to other community resources such as transportation, financial assistance, and basic needs; and connections to other TTD services such as housing, shelter, our Child Protective Services Systems Advocate, and our Enhanced Police Intervention Collaboration.



P.O. Box 704
Portland, ME 04104
Phone: (207) 767-4952
Fax: (207) 767-8109
Email: info@throughthesedoors.org
www.throughthesedoors.org

- Staff in other outreach sites in Portland and Cumberland County's midcoast region, allowing TTD to have a visible and accessible presence in regions outside of the greater Portland area. Other outreach sites in Portland were recently added by TTD to provide a place for survivors to meet with us that were in addition to the Portland Police Dept., as we learned that not all survivors were comfortable or willing to step inside law enforcement offices to meet with an advocate.
- Connection with advocates experienced in issues of abuse in later life to address barriers specific to people who are senior-aged and being victimized by a family member, partner, or caregiver.
- Advocates trained in intercultural advocacy to provide culturally specific and accessible support to immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers (sometimes known as new Mainers).

VOCA funding allows TTD to maintain a basic foundation of core services that supports the diverse needs of the diverse population in Cumberland County in both our population centers and also in our more rural towns. Having that basic foundation in place, TTD is eligible for a wide variety of federal, state, and local grants for specialized and innovative projects such as those in the jail, prison, and re-entry system; within the law enforcement and child protective services systems; for victims of human trafficking; and those that focus on the needs of rural and more isolated populations, to name a few. We are incredibly competitive for and successful at obtaining these additional funding sources that further support crime victims in our county. Without our VOCA foundation, we would be less successful in drawing down these other competitive funding resources, and so the loss of the VOCA funding will have a significant compounding effect on our capacity to meet the needs of those we serve.

The anticipated decrease due to VOCA cuts will most certainly mean that:

- TTD will reduce the number of advocacy staff in our Portland Outreach office in the Portland Police Dept to one person. With three staff in place, we mostly manage to meet the robust need. With only one advocate in that busy office, many people seeking safety planning and support in person will walk away without assistance. The Portland District Court, located within walking distance of the Portland Outreach office, will be seriously underserved with one advocate only available on Protection from Abuse Order days each week. Portland District Court averages around 30 PFA cases on the docket each week. Using the high risk factors identified by Maine's DV Homicide Review Panel, eight to ten of those 30 cases would be considered to be high risk and yet do not have legal representation. With the staff load we currently have, we are able to

guide a survivor through the process 80 to 90% of the time. Support from a trained advocate makes all the difference in the outcome of the day and their on-going safety.

- TTD will close our outreach site in Brunswick, our only visible presence in the midcoast region of Cumberland County. Without an office in Brunswick, we would lose community awareness of our services and the opportunity to provide in-person support and safety planning to individuals and in groups. We would also lose proximity to West Bath District Court, where we have held a weekly presence to support survivors on PFA hearing day. The cost of maintaining this office is relatively affordable but, with VOCA cuts, all dollars must be prioritized for victim safety and this office will not survive these cuts.
- TTD will need to terminate our EPIC program. EPIC (Enhanced Police Intervention Collaboration) was started by TTD in 2009, one of the first of its kind in the nation to focus on high risk case review, follow-up and ongoing work with crime victims, and intense coordination with law enforcement has engaged as many as three full-time advocates at one time. We use a combination of VOCA and other smaller grants to support this program, but without the foundational funding of VOCA, the program is not sustainable.
- TTD will terminate our Young Adult Abuse Prevention Program, YAAPP, a statewide model of school-based abuse prevention education to students in middle and high schools in Cumberland County. YAAPP was started in 1995 and in the pre-pandemic year reached over 3,000 students in over 200 presentations. As we are just getting back into classrooms, we recently updated our curriculum to focus on primary prevention across various grade levels and to align all content with national and state health education standards. Though VOCA dollars do not directly support youth education, with the loss of VOCA funding, we would prioritize the direct service needs of victims. This program, along with a general population community educator, would be discontinued to use that funding for the immediate needs of victims and survivors.
- TTD will close our main office, the only TTD space for employees, that currently houses ten employees, and serves as a hub for staff gatherings and training for new employees and volunteers. Employees will be required to work from homes and or find desk space at community partner offices when possible. This distance and lack of in-person communication and connection will negatively impact staff retention and job effectiveness, but the cost savings will be necessary with the severe funding cuts we are facing.



P.O. Box 704
Portland, ME 04104
Phone: (207) 767-4952
Fax: (207) 767-8109
Email: info@throughthesedoors.org
www.throughthesedoors.org

- TTD will lay-off a part-time employee who has been providing administrative support to deal with the increasing burden placed on nonprofits by funders and regulators.

In total, the VOCA cuts we are facing would mean the loss of:

- at least 5 full-time staff employees,
- one part-time employee,
- a critically placed outreach office in the midcoast region, and
- TTD's staffing and training center.

Thank you for your attention to our testimony and thoughtful consideration of LD 2084. On behalf of Through These Doors and the thousands of victims we serve, please support this bill and ensure crime victims in Maine have the essential services when and where they need them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Hobbs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Rebecca Hobbs
TTD Co-Executive Director