



**Testimony of Pam Morin 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**

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, I am writing on behalf of Family Violence Project to express our support for LD 2084 and the need to fund essential victim services in Maine.

As the Executive Director of Family Violence Project, the domestic violence resource center serving Kennebec and Somerset Counties, I want to share with you what the upcoming cuts to our federal VOCA funding will mean for our agency and the people we serve. Family Violence Project has been serving our communities for over forty years, and we have developed effective working relationships with several community partners to better the safety of victims/survivors and their children. VOCA funds many of the direct services we offer, including our 24/7 helpline, emergency shelter, outreach services, individual advocacy, and court advocacy. Our advocates are present in three courts to assist people seeking protection from abuse orders in understanding how the court system works and to provide emotional support through the process. We are able to connect many of these survivors to legal representation in their protection from abuse cases through a partnership with Pine Tree Legal Assistance. All of these services are essential for the safety of those affected by domestic abuse in our communities. We have a long-standing partnership with the Sexual Assault & Crisis Center in support of victims and their children and partner with them in their Child Advocacy Center to provide domestic violence support as needed. We participate in well-established regional Domestic Violence Task Forces and a variety of community groups to strengthen and coordinate our community's response and make sure there is no wrong door for a crime victim in need of help. These partnerships are vital to creating a way to address domestic abuse and save the lives of those most vulnerable in our communities. Many of these partners will also feel the impact of the VOCA cuts; it will paralyze a well-established and solid safety net for those in need. A 60% reduction would be devastating to our ability to provide this level of vital support. These services save lives!

Our role as advocates includes helping people impacted by domestic violence to validate their experience, assist in safety planning, facilitate access to resources, and to stand with them as they navigate complicated systems and take some of the hardest steps in their lives. In 2023, we provided services and support to more than 2500 survivors in our communities. Our 24/7 helpline allows people to reach out to us in the time frame that is best and safest for them. It is a critical component to what we offer. At full capacity, we can support individuals to sustain safety and aid communities in our quest to end domestic violence. The invaluable work our advocates perform allows for those experiencing abuse to navigate the communities, resources,

and courts more easily and obtain and maintain a healthy, safe, lifestyle. If the state does not take steps to fill the gaps in victim services funding in Maine that will be caused by the reduction in VOCA funds, we will not be able to provide support to survivors as they navigate proceedings in our three courts, and we will need to decrease individual and group advocacy across the board. It will have a negative impact on all of our services and be devastating for victims in Kennebec and Somerset.

It may take years for both counties to recover from the effects of these funding cuts, which will do damage to the progress we have made over the last 40+ years. This VOCA reduction will total more than \$200,000 for our agency alone. And the reduction of services that will result from this reduction will further detrimentally impact our eligibility for competitive federal grants through the Department of Justice; grants which represent additional funds that are essential to our ability to meet the basic needs of survivors. Family Violence Project is not very large, but currently employs 29 individuals. The anticipated cuts will force our agency to reduce our workforce by at least three current employees, plus two additional positions we have not filled due to the anticipated reductions.

Please support LD 2084; lives depend on it.

Respectfully,

Pamela Morin

Pamela Morin LSW, *Executive Director*

(she, her, hers)

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