



MAINE COMMISSION ON DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Testimony of Rebecca Austin, Acting Chair

Writing 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 Austin, I am from Farmington, and I am the acting Chair of the Maine Commission on Domestic and Sexual Abuse (“the Commission”). I am writing on behalf of the Commission in support of LD 2084 and the need for funding to maintain essential victim services in Maine.

The Maine Commission on Domestic and Sexual Abuse (“the Commission”) is extremely concerned about the pending shortfall in VOCA funding. I write to urge you, on behalf of the Commission, to pass LD 2084 to address this crisis. Because of the wide-ranging impact that a loss of this magnitude will have on victim/survivors across the state, it is imperative that the VOCA funding shortfall is addressed by state government. There are no other options to preserve these essential services.

The Commission's statutory charge is to advise and assist the executive, legislative and judicial branches of State Government on issues related to domestic and sexual abuse. Our diverse membership includes the statewide domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions, including the Wabanaki Women's Coalition, survivors of abuse, law enforcement, attorneys, and members of state government.¹

¹ The members of state government, representatives of the AG's office, and judicial advisory member abstained from voting to support this testimony.

VOCA funding supports core services for survivors of crime across the state of Maine. Beginning in FY2025, Maine's VOCA providers are expecting a decrease of approximately 60% or \$5.5 million. **State funding is the only way to fill the expected shortfall and maintain core services, including critical services such as the statewide domestic violence helpline, the only shelter in the state for trafficking survivors, Victim Witness Advocates, and civil legal representation for survivors in Protection from Abuse cases.**

Maine has utilized its VOCA funds to build a comprehensive network of services providers all working closely together to support survivors. VOCA-funded providers not only support survivors of intimate partner violence, they also exist to support survivors of other violent crime. This is the network that responded in the wake of the Lewiston shooting.

Losing this level of funding would dismantle the very foundation of victim services in Maine setting us back decades. Without additional funding to support victim services, the impact will be catastrophic, and survivors of domestic and sexual violence will not have access to the services they need.

The Commission knows you understand the impact this shortfall will have across the state, if not addressed. With this knowledge, the Commission encourages you to take immediate action to pass LD 2084. The need for victim services is not decreasing. What will Maine do to support survivors when the critical safety net of services are no longer available?