

# STATE OF MAINE

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DISTRICT VIII

## **MAINE PROSECUTORS ASSOCIATION** **SHIRA BURNS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

“An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crime”  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
Public Hearing Date: January 23, 2024  
Testimony in Support of LD 2084

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Shira Burns and I represent the Maine Prosecutors Association. This testimony is submitted in support of LD 2084.

Victim Witness Advocates (“VWAs”) have played a vital role in the criminal justice system since the 1970s, providing information and support to crime victims and carrying out many of the statutory victim rights provisions that apply to prosecutor’s offices under Chapter 75 of Title 17-A. In 1987, the Legislature encouraged every county to establish a victim services program. Today, when a Maine crime victim is involved in a prosecuted case – regardless of the type of crime - VWAs are there to provide information, support, and referrals.

Currently, 22 VWAs– at least half of the existing VWA workforce – and the statewide VWA Coordinator are fully or partially funded through VOCA Assistance. In 2022, VWAs funded by the VOCA assistance grant served nearly 15,000 crime victims. Without VOCA funding, twelve counties, Portland Police Department, and the Maine Office of the Attorney General would lose services.

For most people who experience crime, the criminal justice system is full of complex unknowns and can be an intimidating and traumatizing experience. VWAs help prepare victims for court events, explain opportunities to participate and make their voices heard, accompany victims to court proceedings, and serve as liaisons to the assigned prosecutor. Crime impacts everyone in our communities, and when people who experience victimization have access to support and resources to meet their basic needs, we all benefit in the long-term. Providing VWAs services to address the underlying trauma and financial costs of crime helps to break the cycle of harm and prevent future crime as well.

This funding also supports many of our community partners that provide Mainers with all kinds of advocacy. Victims needs a sexual assault advocate when going through a sexual assault forensic exam, victims needs a domestic violence advocate when trying to safely leave an abusive relationship, children need a child advocacy center when having to relive a traumatic event that led to police involvement. Without this bill, funding would also be cut for Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Immigrant Resource Center of Maine, the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine, and Legal Services for the Elderly. All of these providers help support people in our community and contribute to crime prevention.

For these reasons, the Maine Prosecutors Association is in support of LD 2084.