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January 22, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Kathryn Slattery, and I am the District Attorney of York County, Prosecutorial District 1. I submit this testimony in support of LD 2084.

I know you have heard a lot about the dire need the loss of these funds will create. I have tried to write this without using the words “vital”, “critical” or “catastrophic”, but it is simply not possible. Loss of this funding will leave those most vulnerable unprotected in the time of their most dire need. I have been a prosecutor in Maine for a very long time. I have seen the criminal justice system adapt and develop in ways that recognize that all participants are human beings. To lose this funding and the dedicated people who work with our victims will set us back to 1987 when I, as a brand-new prosecutor, first stepped into the Biddeford District Court.

For prosecutors the most striking and beneficial advance has been in the development and use of Child Advocacy Centers to conduct professional forensic interviews of child victims. We have now reached a point where those interviews can be used in court. I applaud this advance and would hate to see it undone by loss of funding. The sight of a 6-year-old child sitting in a witness box facing his or her abuser and telling all those strangers what happened to them is heartbreaking and impossible for many children. We victimize them again by asking it of them and run the risk of child predators being allowed to victimize again.

Additionally, as recent events in Lewiston starkly demonstrated, Victim Witness Advocates are an integral part of the services this state provides to victims of crime. The AG’s Office, DA’s offices, and the courts rely upon advocates to bridge the gap for victims who find themselves entwined in the criminal justice system. They provide information, a voice and compassion for people who have suffered loss through someone else’s criminal behavior.

I urge you to vote in favor of LD 2084.