

Testimony of Melissa Hackett
Coordinator, Maine Child Welfare Action Network
To the Judiciary Committee on January 23rd, 2024
In support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of
Crime

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett. I am a policy associate with the Maine Children's Alliance, which serves as the backbone organization for the Maine Child Welfare Action Network. The Network is comprised of individuals and organizations committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of all children, youth, and families in Maine.

I am here today to testify in support of this legislation, and to strongly urge this committee and the Legislature to take action to fill a critical funding gap for survivors of domestic violence and abuse, as this legislation would do. While I am sure you will hear today from providers who work directly to support victims of domestic violence and child sexual assault, I am here to talk about the connection between child welfare and services for survivors.

Domestic violence and abuse is one of the primary risk factors for families involved with child protective services in Maine. In 2020, the risk factors with the greatest prevalence in indicated or substantiated child maltreatment investigations were neglect, domestic violence, and drug/alcohol use. ([OCFS Child Welfare 2020 Annual Report](#)) One of the primary challenges for child welfare in 2022 was ensuring that parents and children involved with the child welfare system have access to the supportive services they need in order to be safe, stable, happy, and healthy. ([OCFS Child Welfare 2022 Annual Report](#))

Our state's child welfare system response is already struggling on two fronts: the number of families who are coming into crisis, and a lack of child protective caseworkers to meet the current demand. Community-based services to support family members who are survivors of domestic violence and child sexual assault are needed now more than ever in our state.

Yet cuts in the largest funding source for victim services in Maine (VOCA, Victims of Crime Act), would mean that these service providers will experience a 60% cut to funding going into FY24-25 and FY25-26. These cuts would significantly negatively impact the availability of the crisis hotline; legal services for victims; and result in a decrease of 50-60 full time advocates and attorneys statewide who currently support crime victims.

The Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence are key partners in our work to improve support for families navigating the child protective system due to violence in the home. They are one of the organizations that would experience the negative effect of cuts to VOCA funding. They currently work with more than 1,200 mothers who are involved in the child welfare system response. Their advocates provide critical assistance to these parents, and also provide expertise and support to the overburdened caseworkers who are assigned to these complicated cases.

The organizations and frontline workers who support survivors of domestic violence and child sexual assault are a critical part of our state's child welfare system response. They intervene when families are in crisis, and provide the resources and services survivors need to heal and move forward with their lives. We urge you to support this legislation to fill this funding gap and ensure these services are available to ensure child safety and family well-being in our state.

Thank you.

Melissa Hackett
Coordinator, Maine Child Welfare Action Network