



January 23, 2024

Senator Anne Carney, Chair
Representative Matt Moonen, Chair
Committee on Judiciary
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: LD 2084 - An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Katrina Ringrose and I serve as the Deputy Director of Disability Rights Maine, Maine's Protection and Advocacy agency for people with disabilities. We offer the following written testimony to express our strong support for LD 2084, *An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes*.

This bill will prevent catastrophic cuts to Maine's core services to victims of violent crimes. Funding made available under the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) has enabled states to provide services to victims of violent crimes and abuse since 1984. The expected \$5.8 million reduction in federal funding will dismantle decades of work to build Maine's network of nonprofits that serve victims of crime statewide.

As Maine's only cross-disability advocacy organization, we know firsthand the urgent need for comprehensive and accessible support for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Individuals with disabilities are twice as likely to be victims of violent victimization and this risk is even higher for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.¹ Given this elevated risk, people with disabilities must be

¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics, Crime Against Persons with Disabilities, 2009-2015 Statistical Tables, (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd0913st.pdf>

assured continued access to appropriate support services for both the prevention of and response to crime, as currently funded by VOCA.

Just a few months ago, Maine's network of Victim Service Providers played a profoundly essential role in the wake of the Lewiston mass shooting on October 25, 2023. Maine's Deaf community was deeply impacted by this event; of the 18 individuals who were killed, four were Deaf. Survivors included members of the Deaf community as well. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, victims and surviving family members faced a barrage of unimaginable logistics and needs, while grieving the multiple losses of friends and family. For Deaf victims and surviving family members, whose primary language is American Sign Language, not English, navigating this aftermath has been made even more challenging due to language barriers and access needs. Victim Service Providers have provided crucial assistance to help Deaf victims and families, helping to direct them through logistics, identifying resource needs and services, and providing emotional support. These advocates have been, and continue to be, essential to the Deaf families who continue to grapple with the aftershocks of this tragedy.

We must ensure that victims of violence receive the support and resources they need to heal and recover and we urge you to pass LD 2084.

Sincerely,

Katrina Ringrose

Katrina Ringrose
Deputy Director