

Aly Young  
Children's Advocacy Center of York County  
LD 2084

I am writing to express my deep support of LD 2084 which will mitigate concerning cuts to the funding for Children's Advocacy Centers. As a committed advocate for the well-being of children, I implore you to reconsider this decision and approve crucial financial support that these centers desperately need.

Children's Advocacy Centers play a vital role in our communities by providing a safe and nurturing environment for children who have experienced abuse or trauma. These centers serve as a beacon of hope for countless young lives, offering comprehensive support and services that are essential for their healing and recovery. The impacts can be immeasurable: the sense of relief seen on a child when they are believed, the care provided to parents who felt they should have known, of knowing children are being served by people who spend their days ready to receive what they and their families are desperate to put down even for a while.

And some of our impacts are measurable, too—children's advocacy centers rely heavily on data which allows us to best serve our communities in a trauma-informed way, guided by ever-evolving best practice. Maine, dubbed the state with the worst rate of child maltreatment in the country just in April 2023, saw more than 1000 children at its CACs in 2022 alone. This includes cases of sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and witness to violence, to name a few, perpetrated by nearly 1000 different individuals. And this is occurring in OUR communities, these are your children, siblings, and grandchildren, your boss's kids and neighbors and the kids you drive by in the morning who are waiting to get on the bus. And we, the people who engage with these children and families in what can be the worst time in their lives, are ready for it all. We are ready to listen, to be the calm presence, and to help point people who are feeling lost in the right direction of healing.

This funding allows me to show up every day, prepared for whatever a child is needing to let out in an interview. There are high hopes to expand CAC services in the future, including offering supports for children who are at risk for being, or who have been, trafficked, providing therapy and support group services, and simply to grow to reflect the numbers that we are seeing as Centers continue to improve mandated reporting and the identification of abuse. The cuts to this funding will have a ripple effect throughout our community: staff unable to stay due to salaries, children unable to be seen due to availability, families failing to receive necessary referrals for things like specialized medical evaluations, and communities losing a critical resource in the fight against child maltreatment.

I hope I speak for all in saying: I have hope that we as a community, a state, a country, will continue to work towards helping families impacted by trauma. I have hope that our politicians will use their power to strive for that shared goal. I have hope that one day we won't need programs to address this, as it won't be a problem. But until then, all we can do is work towards what we believe in and hope for. I hope you will join me in supporting children's advocacy centers, along with so many other critical community services that our children and families need, in being the boots-on-the-ground trying to make those hopes a reality every day.