

February 14, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Amanda Chambers, and I serve as the Division Manager at Rape Response Services, the designated Sexual Assault Support Center for Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

In my role, I am responsible for overseeing staff and volunteers, ensuring that our community receives comprehensive, high-quality services. We provide 24-hour direct support for survivors of sexual violence and those impacted by it, prevention education in schools, training for community members, and general awareness efforts in our community. Providing these critical services requires hiring individuals with a deep understanding of the impacts of sexual violence and equipping them with extensive training. In their first year, advocates receive over 100 hours of training to develop the foundational knowledge necessary to offer trauma-informed support. Sexual violence advocacy is complex, as are the needs of the survivors we serve.

Despite the critical nature of this work, retaining qualified advocates remains a significant challenge. When I joined Rape Response Services in 2017, there were five full time advocates serving on average twenty-two clients per month in addition to offering trainings, prevention education, awareness, etc. Fast forward eight years and we have added just one additional position and are serving well over 100 survivors per month. During the last eight years, we have seen eighteen employees leave the agency for various reasons and positions going unfilled for months and in some cases over a year. The most common reason for turnover and vacancies in positions was a wage that was not matched to the responsibility of the position, including 24-hour coverage of our helpline. Today, advocates are underpaid, with greater responsibility and workloads. With better pay, we will have fewer vacancies in positions, more longevity in filled positions, and will be better able to serve our communities and the survivors that depend on us. It means more stories will be heard, and more paths to healing and justice will be available.

Survivors deserve access to advocacy. Our communities deserve strong, consistent support services. And the professionals providing these essential services deserve fair compensation. I urge you to support LD 117 to ensure that we can continue to offer the critical advocacy that survivors and our communities rely on.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Amanda Chambers
Division Manager, Rape Response Services