

February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025

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

My name is Emily Jaye, and I am a resident of Bangor. I am a sexual assault advocate in Penobscot and Piscataquis County, and I have been involved in anti-violence work in various capacities since 2019. I am submitting testimony today in enthusiastic support of LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

Advocacy is not work that fits neatly into a nine-to-five, and that is what drew me to it in the first place. We are here whenever survivors need us, and we show up ready to support and empower them no matter the time or circumstance. My workday might start at midnight, with a call to the emergency room to support a survivor whose world has just been shaken up irrevocably. I will spend hours with them, telling them I believe them and that what happened is not their fault. I will talk them through their options for follow up care or reporting their assault, and remind them that an advocate can be with them every step of the way. Sometimes, I am simply the person who passed them a makeup wipe, put on their favorite song during their exam, and helped them regain a sense of “normal”.

As an advocate, I have seen first-hand the difference we make for survivors. I’ve lost count of the number of times my hand has gone numb from being squeezed in a courtroom or an exam room, the sighs of relief I’ve heard when a helpline call is returned, or when we can bring someone a change of clothes after theirs have been collected for evidence. I have been a mother’s tearful first call after her children’s disclosure. I have walked arm-in-arm with survivors out of court rooms, blocking the line of sight between them and their abusers. Advocates are confidantes in a person’s healing. We listen, we follow their lead, and we are with them across their lifetime.

Advocacy is deeply taxing work. I have abruptly left many movie theatres, family dinners, and grocery stores to take a helpline call. I have lost sleep, sneaking away in the night to cover those hospital calls, and I have missed recitals, baby showers, and birthdays to be there when survivors need someone by their side. I have spent hours in court, or in the Children’s Advocacy Center, supporting people through the unimaginable. I do all of this happily, but it is work that takes a physical and emotional toll. It is impossible not to be touched by this work.

I, like other advocates, did not take on this work because I was motivated by money. I do this work because it matters to me, now more so than ever. However, it cannot be ignored that the current salaries for advocates do not match the demands of the work. Additionally, these salaries do not support our ability to care for ourselves, our families, and our financial futures. If we seek to empower survivors and improve their quality of life, that needs to start with us. Advocates should not have to choose between financial stability, and doing work that is so deeply important to ourselves and to our communities.

I want to thank the committee for considering this bill. I am more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily Jaye". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Emily Jaye