

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

My name is David B. Needham, LMSW,cc, Clinical Program Manager for the Two Bridges Regional Jail (TBRJ). I have been the Program Manager at TBRJ since 2016. Prior to that I was the Program Manager at Somerset County Jail (SCJ) since 2012. I have over 30 years of experience as a Social Worker and I am writing with my strongest support and hope of passing LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

Over my years as the mental health provider for these jails, I have witnessed a high correlation between victims of sexual assault presenting with poor coping skills. This inevitably leads to significant substance abuse issues and untreated mental health issues which when combined lead to repetitive legal issues for both the male and female populations.

During my time in this field, I have worked very closely with sexual assault advocates at both facilities. I have found that when I refer a resident to advocates, they have regular, usually weekly contact while the resident is in our facility, and then that advocate also follows the resident into the community for continued care. At the end of the day, for those residents who chose to work with advocates, this significantly reduces recidivism. The advocates I have had the sheer pleasure of working with are extremely caring, personable and professional. They have had a positive impact in the lives of those who have been devastated by their incarceration, as well as their families.

I ask you to please pass and fund LD 117. Without the support of the sexual assault advocates who come into the jail I work in, my job would be harder and the residents I try to help would have worse outcomes and often would end up incarcerated again. Having experienced and caring advocates is very important to my work, and they deserve to be paid enough to stay in it.