

February 19th, 2025

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

My name is Gabrielle Cooper, and I am submitting testimony as a resident of Penobscot County and on behalf of Rape Response Services, where I am employed as an advocate. I am writing to express my **support of LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.**

I am a proud Mainer, born and raised in Kennebec County, and I am dedicated to preventing and responding to sexual violence within this state that I love so much. In my time doing this work, I have seen survivors find healing and opportunity through their engagement with sexual assault services. They have regained custody of children, attained permanent housing, gone back to school, and started working. Others have reconnected with their creativity and voice, seeking to share their story and their art with others affected by violence. Local sexual assault centers and the advocates that provide these services create a healthier, more resilient Maine.

This is important, vital work and it needs to be compensated as such. Current salaries for advocates do not equate to the difficulty of what we do. While I find my job incredibly rewarding, it also requires a great deal of time, energy, and emotional labor. Survivors deserve access to sustainable, well-funded, and fully staffed sexual assault programs. This increased funding would make it possible for myself and other advocates to stay in this work and pay our bills. Our wages have largely stayed the same despite inflation and increases in the prices of groceries and housing over the last few years – and it becomes harder and harder to continue in this work, because while I am passionate about supporting survivors, I also need to eat. When advocates are supported and able to provide for themselves, we are in the best shape to most adequately and responsibly serve the people we work with.

I thank you all for your dedication to Maine and its residents and your support of this bill.

Sincerely,
Gabrielle Cooper
Hampden, ME