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MAINE PROSECUTORS ASSOCIATION **SHIRA BURNS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

“An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony in Support of LD 117

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Shira Burns and I represent the Maine Prosecutors Association. I submit this letter in support of LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

The sustainability of the work sexual assault advocates provide is an integral part of the sustainability of prosecution and the criminal legal system. Sexual assault advocates are vital in the successful prosecution of sexual abuse crimes. Without their help supporting survivors through the criminal justice process, fewer victims would move forward with seeking justice, our jobs would be more difficult, and our state would be less safe.

The criminal legal system can be traumatic and harmful to a survivor. Advocates are a conduit between the survivor and prosecution staff to keep the survivor engaged in the process in a victim-center trauma informed manner. Because of advocates' work, survivors have a better understanding of what is going to happen next in their case and what might be expected of them, so they can prepare. Advocates providing that support, as well as the emotional support a survivor might need in the more difficult moments at court, allows us as prosecutors to focus on the case at hand. I have no doubt that we see better and more enduring outcomes because of advocates' participation in the justice process.

This bill funds sexual assault services to provide a wage that is appropriate for the demanding and difficult work they do. Advocate turnover directly affects the prosecution of sexual abuse crimes and can contribute to the delay in the criminal legal system, and recent turnover rates have clearly shown that we are not paying advocates what they need to be able to remain in this incredibly important work. We need sexual assault advocates and we need them to stay in their positions, for the survivors they serve, for the systems they support, and for the justice they make possible.

For these reasons, the Maine Prosecutors Association is in support of LD 117.