

March 5, 2025

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

My name is Betty Nelson Cheff, and I am a resident of Newcastle, Maine.

I am submitting testimony in support of LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

I was the victim of a horrific 12-hour kidnapping and was repeatedly raped in March 1986. As a young woman of 24, I did not have the skills to prevent this stranger abduction from happening, but I vowed once my perpetrator was apprehended and brought to justice, that I would do everything in my power to prevent him from victimizing others by being released from prison. I also vowed to assist others in both preventing and recovering from these types of attacks. That personal involvement has allowed me to better understand how the system does and doesn't work. My attacker received life plus 28 years in prison. He is still incarcerated nearly 39 years later.

I can't imagine what my life would look like without the assistance of the sexual violence advocates who have been part of my journey. If you want to know what life without sexual violence advocates looks like – just watch an episode of Intervention on A&E, see the destruction of a perfectly good life after a sexual assault, when help isn't sought, and instead a victim turns to dependency. It is devastating and completely unnecessary.

During the past 39 years I have seen victim's rights be promoted and honored and then lately, sadly, I've seen prosecution lack in their support of victims. We would not feel supported and protected without the incredibly important work of sexual violence advocates. Their specialized training gives victims a safe place to emote, discuss, and recover from their experiences.

Sexual violence advocates at a minimum deserve a living wage. They are the most essential part of the network that supports sexual violence victims. Please help us change the trajectory of this amazing work and mandate a minimum annual salary that attracts the best people to make a difference in the lives of many.