

03/06/2025

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

My name is Logan Stanley and I am submitting testimony on behalf of The Children's Advocacy Center of Androscoggin, Franklin & Oxford Counties.

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

I am a Family Advocate, and backup Forensic Interviewer at the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). As a family advocate I work to support families whose child(ren) has been a victim of sexual abuse. At the CAC, we partner with law enforcement, the District Attorney's Office, and Child Protective Services on active investigations of child sexual abuse cases. The CAC makes it possible to interview a child at a neutral family-friendly location, and to have only one interview, rather than making that child tell their story over and over. Investigators can watch from a separate room while a trained forensic interviewer ask the questions. These interviews are child-led, with no leading or coercive questions so that we collect the best information and evidence from a child without re-traumatizing them.

In 2024 our center conducted 254 child forensic interviews for crimes where the family resides in Androscoggin, Franklin, & Oxford counties. The family advocate's role is to support the families that come to the Children's Advocacy Center and provide what we call "community wrap around services", so that every family in our care is given resources they need to move forward and begin to heal. Our center has partnerships with mental health counselors to quickly get the family into trauma focused therapy, and partnerships with Pine Tree Legal Associates to provide legal support if the family needs a protection from abuse order.

Our work at the CAC is so important for our community. Providing support to families who have become victims of such a traumatic crime means they don't have to go through this alone. We also support our local law enforcement and prosecutors by providing crucial testimony in criminal cases of child sexual abuse, making it more likely that those who caused harm will be found accountable. The forensic interview practice is one that was developed through evidence-based research, and our center is nationally accredited through the National Children's Alliance. To keep our accreditation, all staff must go through an initial 40 hours of advocacy training, and forensic interviewers must take an initial 36-hour training on child forensic interviewing by the National Children's Alliance, and then annually staff must also have 8 hours of continuing training to stay up to date with new research and practices.

This job is very demanding, but was one that I chose gladly to help support people in my community. Unfortunately, with the wages that we are paid today I can barely afford living expenses. It is very hard to advocate and support victims when I myself am struggling to make ends meet. With a higher wage it would provide the financial stability that would help keep myself and my fellow staff in the positions longer so we can continue to support our community.

I urge you to vote to pass this bill so that we and others at Children's Advocacy Centers across the state can continue to provide these unique and critical services to some of Maine's most vulnerable populations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Logan Stanley

Family Advocate for The Children's Advocacy Center of Androscoggin, Franklin & Oxford Counties