



Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Lisa Margulies, I serve as Vice President of Public Affairs, Maine, for Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, and I am pleased to submit testimony in support of LD 117.

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care in approximately 10,000 visits per year in Maine at four health centers located in Biddeford, Portland, Sanford, and Topsham, as well as online via telehealth. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, disease testing and treatment, cancer screenings, abortion care as well as a variety of primary care services.

As a mission driven health care provider, we fundamentally believe everyone should be able to access affordable, high quality sexual and reproductive health care in their communities, no matter where they live or how much money they make, and we advocate for policies that help make this vision a reality. All people deserve to access comprehensive reproductive health care, including abortion and gender-affirming care, free from shame, stigma, and intimidation. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of ability to pay, and in a typical year, we provide more than \$1.2 million in free and discounted care to our communities in Maine. For many, we are their only access to the health care system.

As a safety net provider of sexual and reproductive care, we are all too aware of the disturbing prevalence of sexual violence facing our communities and patients. Each year more than 19,000 Mainers experience sexual violence, and nearly one in four Mainers are survivors of rape or attempted rape in their lifetime.<sup>i</sup> Sexual violence disproportionately impacts traditionally disenfranchised populations, with women,<sup>ii</sup> persons of color,<sup>iii</sup> persons with physical or developmental disabilities,<sup>iv</sup> and LGBTQ+ individuals<sup>v</sup> all experiencing significantly higher rates of sexual violence and abuse than the population as a whole.

Sexual assault advocates are the cornerstone of our state's efforts to combat sexual violence, acting as the frontline workers to support survivors and connect them to other vitally needed services. Yet despite this critical role, advocates are woefully underpaid. The lack of adequate funding for sexual assault service has precipitated a staffing crisis for advocates: in fiscal year 2023, 61% of sexual assault advocates left

their positions. Of those that remain, almost half have indicated a plan to leave within the next two years, with the primary reason in 70% of cases being low pay.<sup>vi</sup>

LD 117 represents an opportunity for this legislature to ensure survivors receive the high-quality, trauma-informed care that they need to recover and heal. This bill allows advocates to stay in their positions and continue doing the lifechanging work they are dedicated to without worrying about making ends meet. We urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 117 and ensure that when help is needed it is there.

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<sup>i</sup> Murray, C., Dumont, R & Shaler, G. (2022). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Maine Statistical Analysis Center. University of Southern Maine; accessed: [1-2022-Maine-Crime-Victimization-Report\\_Final.pdf](#)

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Sobsey, D., Doe, T. (1991). Patterns of sexual abuse and assault. *Sexuality and Disability*, 9(3), 243-259.

<sup>v</sup> National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. (2011). *Hate violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and HIV-affected communities in the United States in 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.avp.org/documents>

<sup>vi</sup> Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, LD 117- An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services