

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

My name is Christie Hanson. I am a resident of Auburn, and I work as the Agency Operations & Client Services Coordinator for Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine.

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

In March of 2018, months away from graduating with my Masters degree, I was raped by a peer. What should have been a celebratory period and the beginning of a fulfilling career turned into the most excruciating time of my life. I spent years holding this secret, letting the shame eat me alive, feeling like I had nowhere to turn. The insomnia, panic attacks, depression, and hypervigilance consumed me, turning me into a shell of the friend, daughter, wife, and colleague I once was.

That was until December 2022, when I found the courage to call the Maine Sexual Assault Helpline and connect with an advocate. For the first time, I told someone my story. The advocate on the other end of the line met me with such compassion and validation and was able to connect me with a local support group. This was the moment my healing journey began, no longer alone with my trauma but supported and in the company of others who had gone through something similar. And through that experience, once I was in a place where I could, I knew that I wanted to help others get what they needed to heal too.

In June of 2024, I became a staff member at SASSMM. Since then, I have supported dozens of survivors on the Statewide Helpline, driven hours in the middle of the night to meet survivors getting a SAFE exam in rural Maine, searched for temporary housing for victims who are being abused by spouses, and found counseling resources and food assistance for families of children being served by our CACs. I know first-hand how vital these services are, and I hear it from our clients every day.

This work is both incredibly hard and extremely fulfilling. While I would love to do it forever, I am afraid I can't afford to. I have reduced my living expenses as much as possible- even moving outside of the communities I serve as an advocate because I cannot afford rent prices there. I would love to find development opportunities within this field, but unfortunately those opportunities don't come with any significant salary increase. I have watched gifted, seasoned, passionate colleagues leave this work simply because they cannot make a livable wage. This turnover has direct impacts on our ability to support clients here in Maine.

Thank you to this committee for considering this bill and recognizing how crucial the role of a sexual assault advocate is for the health and well-being of Maine citizens. I encourage you to pass LD117 and to include this funding in the state budget.

Thank you,

Christine Hanson

Auburn, ME

Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine

christie@sassmm.org