

SOMERSET COUNTY SHERIFF'S

OFFICE

Dale P. Lancaster
SHERIFF



Michael O. Mitchell
CHIEF DEPUTY

March 17, 2025

To whom it may concern,

My name is Jeremy Leal, and I am a Detective with the Somerset County Sheriff's Office in Madison, Maine. For the past 11+ years I have been the Crimes Against Persons Detective for the Criminal Division within the Sheriff's Office. Approximately 85-90 percent of my cases involve sexual assaults against children and adults. During this time, I have had the privilege to work with amazing sexual assault advocates from the Kennebec and Somerset County Sexual Assault Crisis and Support Center.

Even though I am the primary investigator for these serious and traumatic cases, there is a team of partners that are also a very valuable and needed component to the investigation. One of those components is the **Sexual Assault Advocate**. The sexual assault advocate plays a significant role in assisting the investigator during the investigation process. They do this by providing crucial assistance and guidance to the survivors and their families as they navigate this often-unfamiliar process. The sexual assault advocate provides contacts to various services available to the survivor and their families to include, medical, mental health, legal, and various other support services that have already partnered with the Sexual Assault Center, making the process so much easier. I have seen first hand how these services have literally saved survivors and their families from falling further in despair, mainly because of the work done by the sexual assault advocate.

Because of the dedication from these sexual assault advocates, I have formed strong relationships with them, knowing they are available for me day or night, willing to meet with or talk with anyone I refer to them during a time of crisis. But even though this work is extremely important, it is often difficult to find people willing to put in the vast amount of time and dedication it takes to be a trusted and effective advocate. One large reason is due to the low wages that are offered for such people. Due to low wages, often times advocates have no choice but to move on to more economical advantageous jobs, that offer more money. Throughout my relationship with the Sexual Assault Center, I have worked with 6+ advocates out of the Kennebec/Somerset County Sexual Assault Center. I'm certain if the wages were higher for this position, many of those people would still be working there today.

In conclusion, I ask that you seriously consider a wage increase for these incredibly important people doing a tremendously difficult job of supporting survivors of sexual assault, and support LD 117.

Respectfully,

Detective Jeremy Leal