

March 18, 2025

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

My name is Kayce Hunton, and I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault. I am submitting testimony in support of LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

Currently, I serve as the Intervention Coordinator at the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA). Before joining MECASA, I spent over 20 years advocating in various roles at two of Maine's sexual assault support centers. I have long recognized how vital the work of advocates is in the lives of survivors of sexual assault and others affected by sexual violence. Advocates are often the unsung heroes and first responders in the lives of survivors and their families. They are the first point of contact for many, welcoming individuals into their offices, meeting families in courtrooms, hospitals, and at Children's Advocacy Centers, as well as in various locations throughout Maine. In fact, advocates frequently become the first people to whom a survivor discloses their experiences, providing crucial support and understanding during the most challenging times.

I have personally witnessed advocates change the course for survivors and their families by offering them nonjudgmental support and belief at times when no one else may have. Advocates provide clients with resources they often did not know were available, along with concrete information regarding the medical and legal systems, which aids in obtaining the care and justice they seek.

Advocates undergo extensive training before working with survivors, and it is through their provision of direct services that they begin to build their skills and develop their expertise. To provide the highest quality services to survivors in Maine, we must ensure that advocates remain at local centers and are compensated fairly for the vital roles they fulfill. High turnover leads to less experienced advocates, placing an additional burden on survivors and families who must continually adapt to new advocates and establish working relationships with them, which is detrimental to their healing.