

Maeghan Maloney
District Attorney

Francis Griffin
Deputy District Attorney

Timothy Snyder
First Assistant District Attorney



STATE OF MAINE
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
PROSECUTORIAL DISTRICT IV

Kennebec County Courthouse
95 State Street, Augusta, ME 04330
(P) 207-623-1156 or 207-623-1157
(F) 207-622-5839

Somerset County Courthouse
41 Court Street, Skowhegan, ME 04976
(P) 207-474-2423 or 207-474-5517
(F) 207-474-7407

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Maeghan Maloney, I am the District Attorney for Kennebec and Somerset Counties and I submitting this testimony in support of LD 117.

Children's Advocacy Centers are an essential tool for prosecuting child sexual assault in Maine. In the past, when my parents were child protective case workers for the state of Maine, we did not have good tools for responding to child sexual assault. When a child disclosed sexual assault, the child was interviewed multiple times by child protective case workers like my parents, law enforcement, district attorneys, and school officials. There were inconsistencies as to whether the interviews were recorded. Now, when a child discloses child sexual assault, we have much better tools in place.

When a child discloses sexual assault or other physical abuse, law enforcement or a DHHS caseworker can refer the child to a Children's Advocacy Center. In Maine, we have statewide coverage of these centers, and they provide two important tools—a forensic interview and family advocacy. A forensic interview is where a child is interviewed by a highly trained, neutral interviewer in a child friendly space. This interview is recorded and can be used for both the law enforcement and DHHS investigation, so the child does not need to be interviewed multiple times. Family advocacy connects non-offending caregivers to services such as civil legal aid and counseling.

Now, CAC interviews are more important than ever based on a new law that allows the interviews to be admissible evidence in civil and criminal cases. I recently used the new law in a case that would not have been able to be prosecuted without the forensic interview due to the child's fear of testifying. After the video was played, the child answered the defense attorney's questions, and later the jury returned a guilty verdict.

CACs need highly trained forensic interviewers and family advocates because these cases are incredibly challenging. When advocates are not paid a living wage, we are

not able to maintain forensic interviewers in this role, it impacts our ability to prosecute child sexual assault cases. For this reason, I am asking you to support LD 117.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ Maeghan Maloney

Maeghan Maloney
District Attorney