

March 19, 2025

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

My name is **Zoe Jones**, and I am submitting testimony in support of **LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services**.

I had the honor of working as a **Family Advocate** at the **Cumberland County Children's Advocacy Center (CAC)**. In that role, I was privileged to stand alongside children and families during some of the most traumatic moments of their lives. When a child experienced abuse, it was my job to walk their non-offending caregiver through the process, connect them to critical resources like counseling and legal aid, and support them emotionally as their family's world shifted.

This work is heavy. It requires compassion, specialized training, and the ability to remain grounded in the face of devastating stories. As part of a sexual assault support center team, this work also meant being on-call — answering the phone at night, on weekends, and during holidays — because trauma does not operate on a 9-to-5 schedule.

I loved this work. I believed in the mission. But like so many others in the field, I was forced to make a choice: stay in a job I loved or leave for something that allowed me to support myself. When I left the CAC, it wasn't because the work was too hard — it was because the **pay was too low**. I simply could not afford to continue doing this vital work in Maine. And I know I'm not alone. Many dedicated, passionate advocates have left or are planning to leave because they cannot survive on the wages currently offered.

This staffing crisis isn't just hurting advocates — it's hurting the children and families we serve. Every time an experienced advocate leaves, it's a loss of knowledge, stability, and continuity of care for families already in crisis.

LD 117 is a necessary step toward fixing this. By increasing wages for sexual assault advocates and CAC staff, this bill will help retain the trained, compassionate professionals our communities rely on. Without these changes, the turnover will continue, and survivors — especially children — will pay the price.

I urge you to vote in support of LD 117. Invest in the people who show up for Maine's most vulnerable children and families every single day.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Zoe Jones

Former Family Advocate
Cumberland County Children's Advocacy Center