

2/26/25

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

My name is Poppy Hiser and I am submitting testimony on behalf of SARSSM (Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine). I am submitting testimony in support of LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

As a nurse with a Masters in Public Health, my job as Prevention and Education Program Manager at SARSSM brings me in contact with people across the lifespan who have suffered from sexual violence in our Maine communities. The confidential 24-hour helpline that we staff as advocates is the heart of our organization, informing the work we do in both prevention and intervention through our connections with the survivors who best understand the impacts of sexual violence on their lives.

It is common while tabling at events to have people approach our advocates and share stories of how our center or another Maine sexual assault support center has helped them to heal from sexual violence in the past. As the CDC has documented, sexual violence takes a lifelong toll on those who survive it, one that can be measured in dollars lost to an inability to work, the costs of healthcare, and many other impacts. But for survivors, the experience is one of lost quality of life, of loss of a feeling of safety, and of lost joy and connection to others. Advocates help bring back that quality of life for survivors and allow victims of these horrific crimes to regain a sense of normalcy and to engage wholly again as important members of our community.

I supervise several advocates who struggle greatly with the financial burden of being in their position. These positions require well-trained individuals to do what is often extremely challenging work. Crimes occur night and day and advocates must be available 365 days a year, and all 24 hours of the day. et their current pay is paltry compared to the duties they must perform. Fewer advocates in our community mean fewer services to the people who so desperately need them - and greater costs to our communities. Please consider the victims and those who serve them when considering this important bill.

Sincerely,

[Poppy Hiser](#) RN/MPH Prevention and Education Program Manager, SARSSM