



Hello,

My name is Amber Michaud, and I am a Family Services Coordinator/Family Advocate for both the Kennebec and Somerset Children's Advocacy Centers. Our CAC is under the umbrella of the Sexual Assault Crisis and Support Center in Kennebec County. I have not been working in this position long, but I have worked in the advocacy/mental health field for at least 8 years.

I am in support of the bill to increase wages for sexual assault advocates. I believe this bill is necessary for us advocates to properly provide support and resources to families. As I stated before, I've been in this field for over 8 years, and it's extremely difficult work. There are not enough people in this field and that only hurts these families. From my experience, the turnover rate for employees in the advocacy and/or mental health field is extremely high, and it's not just from burnout. It has a lot to do with wages and how employees tend to not get paid enough to compensate for the important work we do.

My current position as a family advocate requires lots of travel while utilizing my own personal vehicle. While our company reimburses a certain amount of cents/change per mile, eventually it is a lot of wear and tear on my vehicle. That is not something our company would pay for if something were to happen to my vehicle.

To continue, increased wages for advocates would deeply benefit our community. Being in this field for as long as I have, there will always be a job/career out there with better pay whether that job is important to our community or not. Increasing our wages ensures that the turnover rate will decrease, which in turn will provide more support and resources for families in our community. Families in our community continue to hurt due to the lack of support and resources. We are one of only a few resources that families have access to. Law enforcement and DHHS/CPS can sometimes feel intimidating in a time when you're most vulnerable and looking for help. However, we are the neutral party between those two parties to ensure that families are and feel supported and have a comfortable experience with us. It is our goal to be there for clients and their families as much as we possibly can. Therefore, low wages are not just difficult and detrimental on the families in our community, but for us advocates as well.

Thank you,

Amber Michaud