

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Myer and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee Health and Human Services:

I urge you to vote YES on LD117 and I thank you for your time and attention to this issue.

In my mind as I write this are a set of students -call them Jane and Joy. Jane started struggling in the college course I was teaching . When I asked what was happening, she disclosed that she was spending a significant amount of time and emotional energy supporting Joy, who had been sexually assaulted and did not want to make a formal report. Joy had stopped eating, sleeping or attending class and Jane was beside herself about how to help. Both student's grades were slipping but understandably their attention was on the crisis Joy was navigating. Jane wanted to talk to me after every class period, and I found myself unable to maintain the level of emotional connection and labor she needed.

I encouraged Jane to call the Statewide Sexual Assault Services hotline, letting her know that her call could stay confidential and that the organization would support her as a peer support provider. She desperately needed help, as a helper. Jane then connected Joy to confidential support services and advocacy. This support did not magically solve all of the problems these students experienced but it did make it possible for them to finish the semester in good standing. The alternative - dropping classes or flunking out - would have resulted in an additional significant crisis, as student loans are not simply forgiven in these circumstances.

USM would benefit from a much stronger [SARSSM](#) presence on campus but the organization simply does not have the resources to “do more for less”and high rates of staff turn-over undermine ongoing relationships, trust and confidence. Our communities depend on someone answering the hotline when we share it, depend on advocates able to take time and share resources and accompany survivor's to hospitals and police stations. This is extraordinarily hard work, skilled work and time consuming work and deserves to be well compensated and fully funded. We need to allocate much more money to this work than even LD117 requires; please take the first step and pass this bill. This is simply one anecdote of thousands.

The need to maintain a younger skilled workforce in Maine is well-documented. However, we often fail to fully address one of the most significant and preventable factors driving young people out of college, jobs, and the state itself: sexual violence. LD117 directly addresses the importance of sexual violence prevention and response as a vital workforce development effort.

One in four women college students experiences sexual violence while enrolled, and an even greater number of 18- to 24-year-olds who are not in school are victimized during

these years. Research overwhelmingly demonstrates the devastating economic consequences (economic costs are not the most important consequences for survivors but they are a significant burden).

Of particular note, given the Governor's commitment to desegregating male-dominated occupations, is the high rate of harassment in these sectors. Reducing sexual violence must be part of the strategy.

Survivors of sexual harassment and assault frequently leave school, change jobs, or are pushed out through retaliation, denial of advancement, or the emotional toll of trauma. The financial burden is staggering. Estimates put an individual's lifetime cost of rape at \$122,461. This is an unjust and avoidable financial burden placed on Maine's girls, women, and Trans people. Investing in prevention and post-vention is essential for a more functional and fair economy, and depends on strong and well resourced sexual violence response services.

Support for survivors cannot be optional. When individuals disclose sexual violence, they need access to highly trained advocates who can provide resources and ensure they are not retraumatized by the response system itself. Cutting these services while sexual violence remains so pervasive is both irresponsible and harmful. Research shows that when survivors receive a poor response to disclosure, they face an increased risk of PTSD and other problems. Without well-trained advocates, the State fails in its duty to protect its residents and stymies many other collective initiatives.

As an educator, I have seen firsthand how untrained and unsupported students—particularly women and nonbinary students—are left to provide peer support for friends who experience sexual violence. This creates collective trauma that damages student health and education outcomes. Maine's Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct on College Campuses is an important step in addressing this, but it relies heavily on confidential off-campus resources—resources that require full funding to be effective.

Many survivors and their allies pursue careers in violence prevention and support, a field that remains gender-segregated and severely underpaid. It is simply impossible to live anywhere in Maine for \$40,000 a year, adding to the risk for workers of further or future gender based violence or sexual violence.

This creates a cruel double bind: survivors are drawn to work that helps others, yet they are funneled into a profession where they struggle to earn a living wage. Without stronger financial investment in this sector, we are perpetuating the very cycles of economic instability that make people vulnerable in the first place and devaluing prevention and response services we all deeply depend on.

LD117 is an essential step in supporting survivors and strengthening Maine's workforce. But we must go further. We will need even more funding for violence prevention, and we need to shift the financial responsibility toward those who enable or perpetrate harm. Employers that fail to prevent workplace harassment and assault should contribute more to the cost of response services. Perpetrators should bear more of the financial burden, not survivors. Without greater resources for prevention, we are forcing the most vulnerable to shoulder a financial double tax—the cost of experiencing violence and the cost of providing support to others.

I urge you to support LD117 and to push for even greater investment in violence prevention and survivor support. The future of Maine's workforce, economy, and young people depends on it.

Sincerely,

Kimberly C Simmons, PhD
Portland ME