

3/20/25



Helping Our Community Become Silent No More

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

My name is Donna Strickler and I am a resident of Winthrop and the Executive Director of the Sexual Assault Crisis & Support Center, which serves Kennebec and Somerset Counties.

I am submitting testimony in support of LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

I am here today to urge you to support fair compensation for sexual violence advocates. These professionals are the backbone of support for survivors, providing critical services that are often life-changing — and in some cases, life-saving. Despite the emotional toll and immense responsibility they carry, many advocates are paid far below a living wage. This must change if we are to truly support survivors and build safer, healthier communities.

Sexual violence advocates are not just kind-hearted volunteers; they are highly trained professionals who provide essential services 24/7. They respond to crisis calls, accompany survivors to hospitals for forensic exams, assist with navigating the legal system, and connect victims to crucial resources for housing, counseling, and safety planning. This work requires deep empathy, specialized knowledge, and the ability to manage trauma with professionalism and care.

The emotional weight of this role cannot be overstated. Advocates often absorb the pain, anger, and fear survivors carry, yet they continue showing up — day after day — to ensure no one faces this journey alone. Without their unwavering support, many survivors would be left without guidance during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives.

Despite their vital role, many advocates are underpaid and overworked. The reality is that low wages lead to high turnover, which creates instability for both survivors and the organizations that serve them. Investing in living

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P.O. Box 417
Winthrop, ME 04364
Admin: 207-377-1010
Fax: 207-377-1013

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both survivors and the organizations that serve them. Investing in living wages for advocates is not just about fairness — it's about ensuring survivors have access to experienced, consistent, and compassionate care when they need it most.

If we value the well-being of survivors, we must value those who dedicate their careers to supporting them. By ensuring advocates earn a living wage, we are strengthening our communities, improving survivor outcomes, and demonstrating that this work — and the lives it touches — matter deeply.

I urge you to prioritize funding that provides sexual violence advocates with fair wages that reflect their invaluable contributions. Survivors deserve stable, experienced advocates by their side — and advocates deserve to be compensated accordingly.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donna Strickler". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline.

Sincerely,

Donna Strickler

Executive Director

Sexual Assault Crisis & Support