



**Testimony of Jennifer Annis**  
**Written testimony in support of L.D. 117**  
**An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services**

*Date of Public Hearing: March 20, 2025*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Jennifer Annis. I am the Project Manager for the Violence Intervention Partnership (VIP), a division of the Cumberland County Public Health Department. I am providing written testimony on behalf of the Cumberland County Public Health Department in support of L.D. 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

VIP is Cumberland County's Coordinated Community Response to domestic and sexual abuse and is comprised of multidisciplinary community partners to include local domestic and sexual abuse providers, human trafficking providers, criminal and civil legal partners, representatives from elder abuse and child abuse agencies, medical providers, representatives from community organizations and more. Sexual Assault Resource Centers across Maine lessen the trauma and long-term impacts to survivors by providing ongoing support. These important programs must remain fully funded so no Mainer has to wonder where they can turn when they need support, resources and healing after experiencing sexual abuse. Below are some of the reasons Sexual Assault Resource Center services are essential and must be supported by L.D. 117.

**Sexual abuse impacts people across the lifespan**

Children<sup>1</sup>, youth<sup>2</sup> and adults<sup>3</sup> here in Maine have experienced sexual abuse. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that over half of women and almost one in three men have experienced sexual violence involving physical contact during their lifetimes.<sup>4</sup>

**Sexual abuse negatively impacts health**

People who have experienced sexual abuse face physical and/or psychological impacts. Some of these consequences are short-term while others have lifelong

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<sup>1</sup> MECASA Center Service Statistics, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Maine Centers for Disease Control. (2019). 2019 Maine integrated youth health survey. Retrieved from [https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/files/2019\\_Reports/Detailed\\_Reports/HS/MIYHS2019\\_Detailed\\_Reports\\_HS\\_State/Maine\\_High\\_School\\_Detailed\\_Tables.pdf](https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/files/2019_Reports/Detailed_Reports/HS/MIYHS2019_Detailed_Reports_HS_State/Maine_High_School_Detailed_Tables.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Dumont, R & Shaler, G. (2015). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

<sup>4</sup> Basile KC, Smith SG, Kresnow M, Khatiwada S, & Leemis RW. (2022). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Sexual Violence. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

impacts. Examples include, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, or post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>5</sup> Sexual violence is also linked to negative health behaviors.<sup>6</sup>

### **Sexual Abuse Impacts All of Us**

Survivors of sexual abuse are all around us. They are our friends, family members, neighbors, colleagues, and possibly your own experience. Each year, 19,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.<sup>7</sup>

**Sexual Assault Services are critical to ensuring people are supported in a variety of ways throughout the process of coping with their experience.** Sexual Assault Resource Centers provide prevention services as well as support services long after the acute trauma has subsided. In their own words, survivors in Cumberland County have reported the importance of working with local advocates:

*“It’s over. You and the legal team that you introduced me to saved my life. I can finally be at peace now.”* – Survivor who obtained a protection order after years of sexual violence.

*“I have struggled to be heard and feel safe. Working with your organization, I finally feel like I have the right to justice and safety.”* -Survivor who filed a police report with the assistance of an advocate.

*“Participants were grateful for you engaging them about the work that you do and their safety concerns.”* - Host of a community outreach event with many survivors present

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. Please support people who have experienced sexual abuse by voting in favor of passing L.D. 117.

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<sup>5</sup> Basile KC and Smith SG. (2011). Sexual Violence Victimization of Women: Prevalence, Characteristics, and the Role of Public Health and Prevention. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* (5): 407-417.

<sup>6</sup> Basile KC, Clayton HB, Rostad WL, & Leemis RW. (2020). Sexual violence victimization of youth and health risk behaviors. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 58(4), 570-579.

<sup>7</sup> Murray, C., Dumont, R & Shaler, G. (2022). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Maine Statistical Analysis Center. University of Southern Maine