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LD 117

Hello, my name is Julia Russell. I am a resident of Falmouth, a small business owner in Biddeford, and was born and raised in Saco. I am also a survivor of early childhood sexual assault. As a child, I was unable to comprehend the situation I was in at the insidious hands of a family friend, and, as a result, turned inward as a form of self-protection and self-preservation. For nearly 30 years I held the secret of this sustained sexual abuse to myself until I was emotionally strong enough to begin the work of healing and untangling the nuanced and complicated impact that the abuse had on me.

In 2021, I began the process of holding my abuser to account, and brought a federal civil case against him. Having engaged in that legal battle for two years before reaching a resolution, I am someone who understands the importance of having advocates who stand in your corner when you are facing the most challenging experience of your life. It is my firm belief—and the data supports this—that sexual assault advocates are crucial to the wellbeing of our communities. They act as essential supports for both child and adult survivors of sexual assault, and allow system partners, such as law enforcement and the legal system, to be more effective.

The job of a sexual assault advocate is not glorious, and it is not easy, but it is critical. Without them, the integrity of our close-knit Maine communities is undermined. These are not expendable roles. And due to the difficult nature of their work, advocates are not easily replaced. We must fortify all efforts to retain them. The least we can do is ensure them a livable wage. I urge you to invest in their work and in the mental health our communities by supporting LD 117.