

Testimony of Francine Garland Stark, on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence
In Support of LD 117: An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services
Thursday, March 20, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am writing on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV)¹ in support of LD 117, “An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.”

The Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence and the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault each represent statewide networks of grassroots advocacy centers that provide essential services for people affected by interpersonal violence. Sexual Assault Center advocates provide a specialized response to people whose victimization was specific to sexualized violence, sexual harassment, and the unfortunately wide range of ways that sexual abuse is committed. These services are vital, and the advocates who provide them should be robustly compensated.

We no longer live in a time when we can rely on volunteers and staff who accept low pay because they are willing to sacrifice wages for the opportunity to do mission driven work. Sexual abuse and violence are widely perpetrated and deeply hidden across Maine’s population. Most people never reach out for help, and more rarely still to the legal system. The importance of a well-resourced and accessible statewide network of advocacy services cannot be overstated. Whether one’s experience of sexual abuse was today or 50 years ago, support for safety, healing and pathways to justice should be readily available and provided by trained, professional, trauma-informed advocates who are prepared to meet each survivor ‘where they are’ in their journey and facilitate connections with appropriate resources.

The Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence and the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault and their member programs work collaboratively to ensure that each survivor can

¹ MCEDV supports and represents a membership of victim services providers that includes Maine’s eight regional Domestic Violence Resource Centers, as well as two culturally specific services providers. Last year, our programs provided services to more than 12,000 survivors of domestic abuse and violence and their children in our state.

access the services that they need and that community systems are well informed of the unique aspects of safety, healing, and justice for particular types of victimization. On behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, I strongly encourage your support of LD 117, ensuring the continued sustainability of sexual assault services in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration.

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