



Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony in Support of L.D. 117, *An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services*
By Heide Lester on behalf of EqualityMaine

March 20, 2025

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Heide Lester, and I am the Deputy Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. We strongly support L.D. 117, *An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services*.

Sexual assault happens in every community and affects people of all genders and ages. However, members of the LGBTQ+ community experience disproportionate rates of sexual victimization. For example, the CDC has reported that almost 80% of bisexual women, over 56% of bisexual men, and almost 60% of both lesbian women and gay men have experienced contact sexual violence in their lifetimes.¹ Almost half of all transgender people have been sexually assaulted at some point, and these rates are even higher for trans people of color and those who have done sex work, been unhoused, or have (or had) a disability.² According to the 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, LGBTQ+ youth reported being forced (physically or otherwise) to have sexual contact approximately three times more than cisgender, heterosexual students.³

Sexual Assault Support Centers (SASCs) connect survivors to resources and support networks, offer information about legal options, and provide advocacy, crisis intervention, prevention, and education programs and services to people impacted by sexual violence – both survivors themselves and the people who care about them. Each year, 19,000 people in Maine will experience sexual violence, and one in five people in Maine will experience sexual assault at some point in their lifetime.⁴ The need for SASCs' response and prevention services continues to grow, with the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault reporting that in 2024, there was a 9% increase in demand for support.⁵ And in providing critical support to survivors, Maine's SASCs are vital to increasing safety in all our communities.

We urge you to vote "Ought To Pass" on L.D. 117. Maine's SASCs have been working and organizing in our communities for decades and it is essential to provide them with the funding they need.

Thank you,

Heide Lester (they/them)

¹ "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) 2016/2017: Report on Victimization by Sexual Identity," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/nisvsreportonsexualidentity.pdf.

² "The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey," *National Center for Transgender Equality*, 2016, transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf.

³ "High School Detailed Report," *Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2023*, maine.gov/miyhs/2023-results.

⁴ Murray, Clare, et al. "2022 Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing Public Policy for Safer Communities." *USM Digital Commons*, digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/justice/43/.

⁵ Pendharkar, Eesha. "Facing Cuts, Abuse Survivors Implore Maine Lawmakers to Bolster Victim Services Funding," *Maine Morning Star*, 2025, mainemorningstar.com/2025/01/16/facing-cuts-abuse-survivors-implore-maine-lawmakers-to-bolster-victim-services-funding/