



April 17, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change.

We are here today **in support of LD 1139, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes**, and thank Senator Carney for sponsoring this important bill.

Sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and stalking are public health crises in Maine, disproportionately affecting women and children, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people of color. Forty percent of women in Maine have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by a partner at some point in their lifetime—nearly as many as every person in Maine living north of Augusta. The numbers are far higher for Native American women¹, people with disabilities², trans people³, and other historically marginalized populations. **This violence results in significant disparities across every aspect of physical, emotional, and financial well-being.** These costs—tangible and intangible—are shouldered by people, families, communities, and the state. Most state systems, from mental health to criminal justice to social services, share the burden of this violence.

Links between experiencing violence, economic security, and the ability to access services and support systems are clear. Low-income Mainers and those without regular access to food and housing stability are more likely to experience domestic violence. Once they do, they face greater barriers in accessing services. [According to MCEDV](#), 98% of domestic violence resource center providers have worked with a survivor who didn't have reliable access to transportation. According to MCEDV's report on economic abuse, "abuse creates economic instability. And, in turn, economic instability reduces safety options for survivors and makes them more vulnerable to continued violence and isolation. The ability to access safety often hinges on access to economic resources, and while abuse can occur in any income bracket, people in poverty are nearly twice as likely to experience domestic violence." Staff at Maine

¹ Rosay, A. B. (2016, May). Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men 2010 Findings From the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. National Institute of Justice Research Report.

² Sobsey, D. (1994). Violence and abuse in the lives of people with disabilities: The end of silent acceptance. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brooks Publishing, Co., Inc.

³ National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. (2011). Hate violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and HIV-affected communities in the United States in 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.avp.org/documents>

Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA) reiterate this point: “Survivors’ access to transportation is a majorly overlooked factor in whether they can access healthcare, services, resources, or even engage in the legal system.”

These links make LD 1139 all the more important. **Federal Victims of Crime Act funding is the backbone of Maine victim services infrastructure.** You will hear throughout the testimony the many ways that this funding ensures access to services, supports, and healing - from domestic violence shelters and child sexual abuse forensic interviews, to human trafficking resources and prosecutorial victim witness advocates. **Almost no part of Maine’s victim service infrastructure is untouched by VOCA, which means that no part will escape the harm when these federal funds are cut.**

This is not only about supporting victims of crime. It is about supporting Maine’s public health and prosecutorial infrastructure, and ensuring that we preserve all we have built in the last 20 years to offer safety and healing for all Mainers.

We hope you will vote Ought to Pass.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague
Maine Women’s Lobby