

Testimony of Senator Jill C. Duson in support of
**LD 2163, An Act to Improve the Response to Complaints by Victims of Crime and Enhance
Victims' Rights**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Jill Duson, I am the State Senator from District 27 and have the privilege of representing part of Portland and part of Westbrook. I'm also honored to serve as the Senate Assistant Majority Leader. I am here today to speak in support of LD 2163, An Act to Improve the Response to Complaints by Victims of Crime and Enhance Victims' Rights.

This legislation is imperative to ensure that all victims of crime can meaningfully participate in the criminal legal system process in the ways that Maine statutes intend and that they are able to do so regardless of where in the state the crime was committed. Victim rights exist because we know they contribute to healing. When the system only promises those rights, but doesn't follow through, the system instead contributes to victim trauma. Making certain our state has a centralized victim rights complaint process ensures equal access to justice and healing.

Currently, crime victims with complaints are told to be in touch with their local prosecutor's office. With eight prosecutorial districts, and some cases handled by the Maine Attorney General's Office, there is no clear process for crime victims when they have concerns that the response they received in this sometimes very personal court process was not what it was supposed to be. Nor is there a clear avenue for crime victims when they want to try to ensure the next crime victim doesn't experience the same gap or challenge in practice. LD 2163 sets out a process that has proven to work in other states to address inconsistencies in crime victim response by putting forward a collaborative approach that is focused on information sharing and problem solving. Put simply, when a victim's rights are violated, this bill will ensure we convene a table to examine what went wrong and, more importantly, work on how to avoid those mistakes in the future.

Lastly, in calling for all three branches of government to receive an update every two years, the state will, for the first time, have quality information to understand how victim rights are being accounted for across the state. This will allow for periodic consideration of concrete ways Maine can make continued improvements to our responses to crime victims.

I am grateful to Representative Gramlich for introducing this bill and bringing this important conversation to this Committee for discussion. I respectfully urge you to support LD 2163 and would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.