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LD 2168

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Casey Bernardini, and I respectfully ask you to support the people of the state of Maine by voting in favor of LD 2168.

Unfortunately, human trafficking may never fully disappear from our society. Gone are the days of believing this only happens in faraway places or only in the depths of large cities. Trafficking and exploitation happen everywhere — including here in Maine.

Today, I am just a woman standing before you, sharing my words and trusting you with the responsibility of making decisions that can help make our state and our communities safer.

Survivors do not walk away untouched. Trauma, housing instability, and lack of access to care are ongoing realities. When services are underfunded or unavailable, survivors are left to carry the burden alone.

LD 2168 places accountability where it belongs: on the individuals who create demand for commercial sexual exploitation. The bill imposes financial assessments on people convicted of purchasing sex and trafficking-related offenses and directs those funds into the Victims' Compensation Fund to support survivors.

Some may argue that this bill creates hardship. It does — but that hardship falls on the people whose actions allow the sex trafficking industry to exist and flourish. The financial consequences outlined in LD 2168 are not excessive; they are proportionate and intentional. They reflect the reality that exploitation is driven by demand, and demand must be addressed if we are serious about prevention.

Passing LD 2168 would provide more consistent, survivor-centered funding for essential services across Maine. It would help ensure that survivors are not forced back into unsafe situations due to lack of resources. At the same time, it sends a clear message that purchasing human beings carries real consequences. This bill strengthens Maine's response to trafficking by supporting healing while disrupting the systems that enable exploitation.

I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2168. This bill represents accountability, fairness, and a commitment to protecting those who have been harmed rather than those who profit from that harm. Thank you for your time and for listening to my testimony.