



Maine Chiefs of Police Association
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Statement in support of

L.D. 2212, (Supplemental Budget – Part 000)

**Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety**

February 25, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Beebe Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committees. My name is Scott Stewart. I am the Chief of the Brunswick Police Department and the president of the Maine Chiefs of Police Association. I am providing testimony on behalf of the Association in support of Part 000 of the supplemental budget.

The Maine Chiefs of Police Association's mission is straightforward: to strengthen the working relationships among Maine's police leaders, to promote professionalism and consistent standards across the state, and to support the men and women who serve our communities every day. At the heart of that mission is a shared commitment to protecting life and property and upholding the values of our profession.

Our Association has been a strong supporter of Maine's sexual assault forensic examination kit tracking system since its creation through LD 1484 in 2023. Our commitment to a clear, reliable, and victim-centered tracking process remains just as strong today as it was three years ago.

Our municipal law enforcement departments worked closely with the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA) on their pilot project to implement kit tracking and complete an inventory in Kennebec and Penobscot Counties. That work has positioned Maine well for statewide implementation, but the pilot funding has long since run out. We appreciate that the Governor has recognized this need and included language in her budget (Part 000) to support continued progress.

A statewide system will allow victims and system partners alike to know where a kit is in the process and will provide better, more accurate data to improve Maine's response to sexual assault. These changes refine the structure of the tracking system statute and ensure that it accurately reflects how forensic evidence is handled in Maine. This kind of clarity is essential for law enforcement, hospitals, prosecutors and, most importantly, for victims who deserve transparency and trust in the process.

As we highlight the importance of this system, we must also emphasize the essential role of sexual assault advocates. Sexual assault advocates provide critical support to survivors throughout investigations and prosecutions. They help inform and reassure victims, often resulting in higher levels of cooperation, greater accountability for offenders, and reduced secondary trauma for survivors.

These professionals possess rare and vital qualities: the ability to listen to painful stories, to sit with survivors during their most vulnerable moments, and to empower individuals as they navigate traumatic experiences. Law enforcement officers deeply appreciate and value the work they do. We rely on advocates to be available 24 hours a day—to meet survivors at the hospital, explain the option of having evidence collected through a rape kit, support them during interviews, and remain by their side long after our role concludes.

Last year, the Legislature made a meaningful investment by raising advocate salaries from the low \$30,000s to a floor of \$45,000. The impact was immediate: turnover dropped from 60% to below 20%. That stability has directly benefited survivors and improved coordination with law enforcement. But that funding runs out this year. Without continued support, Maine risks losing the very workforce that ensures victims receive compassionate, effective assistance.

Supporting ongoing funding for sexual assault advocates is one important way to recognize the magnitude of their work and ensure survivors are not left without essential support. For these reasons, we also urge you to move advocate funding into the baseline budget.

Taken together, the updates in Part 000, investment in statewide kit tracking, and sustained support for sexual assault advocates strengthen every part of Maine's response to sexual violence. These investments work hand-in-hand, and each is necessary for a system that is reliable, trauma-informed, and centered on the needs of survivors.