



Jill Duson
Senator, District 27

THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

**Testimony of Senator Jill Duson in Support of LD 566, “An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
March 27, 2023**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Distinguished Colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Jill Duson. I represent Senate District 27, which includes parts of Westbrook and Portland. I am here to introduce LD 566, “An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.”

This legislation raises the salaries of sexual assault advocates from \$32,000 to \$45,000, which would place their wages on par with that of teachers. This bill would also fund additional services for organizations serving those populations disproportionately impacted by sexual violence. The bill proposes to allocate funds from the General Fund to provide funding for these services. For the 2023-2024 fiscal year, \$1,230,000 would be allocated. \$1,830,000 would be allocated for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

Currently, Maine is facing a crisis. The number of sexual assault advocates able to provide services for survivors is decreasing, while the number of survivors is increasing. The severe shortage of advocates in this field means that they have oversized caseloads. This understaffing results in not only chronic burnout among the advocates, but also that survivors are not able to get full support in their difficult journey to seek justice.

It is important to stress how critical sexual assault advocates are to the process of justice for survivors of sexual violence. Navigating the legal system is a constant uphill battle. Advocates are essential in ensuring that survivors have access to the ability to move forward with their case. In addition, the complicated logistics of the court system pale in comparison to the emotional trauma that survivors deal with through the whole process and the rest of their lives. Seeking justice in the legal system requires survivors to relive their trauma repeatedly, causing massive emotional harm. Sexual assault advocates understand the challenges survivors face and their need for emotional support.

Today, there are a lot of advocates and supporters here, but we’ve selected just a section to speak in respect for the Committee’s time. First, you will hear directly from those who have used sexual assault centers and those who work at them. Next, you will hear from agencies who work closely with sexual assault centers. Finally, you will hear from those organizations that would receive new funding to serve sexual assault survivors in their communities.



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In addition, there are many more advocates and supporters not here, including those currently staffing the 24/7 helpline in their regions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.