

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services

Serving Oxford, Franklin and Androscoggin Counties

www.sapars.org

March 27, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyers, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Meagan Davis, and I am submitting testimony today on behalf of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services (SAPARS), which is one of Maine's sexual violence prevention and response programs and Children's Advocacy Center that serves the Counties of Androscoggin, Oxford, Franklin as well as the towns of Bridgton and Harrison. Our free and confidential services work to prevent and eliminate sexual violence, promote healing and empowerment for people of all genders, and ages who are affected by rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, stalking and sexual harassment.

SAPARS is here today to testify in favor of LD 566 "An Act to Fund Sexual Assault Services".

With over 30 years of services, SAPARS has retained several staff for more than 15 years. Their dedication and passion to support and advocate for those impacted by sexual violence is admirable. Sadly, for the majority of staff, they have come to a crossroad of doing what they are passionate about and being able to afford to live.

Their training, expertise and community collaboration has been pivotal in providing services. With staff needing to find higher paying jobs, as an organization and a resource in our communities, we end up with those gaps in services that we have worked so hard to eliminate.

At a current base salary around \$30,000, vacant positions are being overlooked and/or we are unable to retain staff. The onboarding process is purposefully extensive so that all advocates are fully equipped to work in a trauma sensitive field as experts. This is not only time consuming but also costly and is not sustainable. Vacant positions also place more expectations on existing staff as they are to fill programmatic needs not being covered (i.e. 24/7 helpline shifts, court accompaniments, community drop-ins/trainings, etc.).

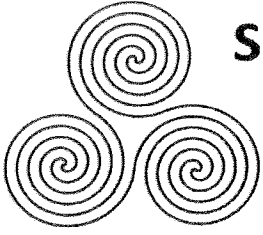
ANDROSCOGGIN COUNTY
182 Webster St | Lewiston, ME 04240
207-784-5272

FRANKLIN COUNTY
144 High St. | Farmington, ME 04938
207-778-9522

OXFORD COUNTY
66 Paris St. | Norway, ME 04268
207-743-9777

24 HOUR RESPONSE SERVICES
1-800-871-7741
1-888-458-5599 (TTY)

This work is supported by funding from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services; the United Way of Oxford, Franklin and Androscoggin Counties; the cities and towns of Oxford and Androscoggin Counties; and donations by generous businesses, organizations and individuals.



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Above staff's 40 hours a week, taking on more helpline shifts for example means from 6 pm to 6 am, staff are supporting callers over the phone throughout the night. Covering the helpline also means that staff must be ready to be dispatched out to our local hospitals if there is a victim/survivor seeking a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam. This support process focuses on physical forensic collection after a sexual assault has occurred. If the victim/survivor wishes to report the assault to Law Enforcement, then a statement may also be provided at the hospital. From the start of the exam to the end, advocates are providing support on an average of four hours for one accompaniment. Once their assistance is no longer needed at the hospital, they are to remain on the helpline until their shift coverage is over. This may result in more phone support calls or the possibility of another hospital accompaniment. Staff are then expected to resume "business as usual" for their regularly scheduled work day.

As a result, staff are taking on more responsibility and yet they are seeing more of their paychecks dwindle to the rise in the cost of living and the yearly rise in healthcare coverage.

Due to this growing concern, I am asking for your support on LD 566 and incorporating that bill into the budget so our advocates can stop having to choose between their career and being able to meet their basic needs.

I think you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully Submitted,

Meagan Davis
Executive Director
SAPARS

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