

# DISABILITY RIGHTS MAINE

March 27, 2023

Senator Joseph Baldacci, Chair  
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair  
Committee on Health and Human Services  
Cross Office Building, Room 209  
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: L.D. 566, *An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services*

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Katrina Ringrose and I serve as the Deputy Director of Disability Rights Maine, Maine's Protection and Advocacy agency for people with disabilities. We know firsthand the urgent need for comprehensive and accessible support for survivors of sexual violence, which is why I am here today to express our strong support for LD 566.

As the state's only cross-disability advocacy organization, DRM has been advancing the rights of individuals with disabilities for 45 years. With a staff of 52, DRM's advocates and attorneys are experienced in creating positive change through negotiation, public policy reform, training, and litigation. DRM operates numerous federal, state, and private grants/programs, which serve individuals of all ages, across disability label.

Studies have consistently shown that individuals with disabilities are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual violence than their non-disabled peers. In fact, national studies estimate that almost 80% of people with disabilities are sexually assaulted on more

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MAINE'S PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY AGENCY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

than one occasion and 50% of those experienced more than 10 victimizations.<sup>1</sup> This risk is even higher for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Despite this elevated risk, people with disabilities continue to face numerous barriers to accessing appropriate support in both prevention and response. For example, many sexual assault prevention programs are not designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities. This can make it difficult for people with disabilities to access information and resources that could help them prevent sexual assault.

Similarly, when it comes to responding to sexual assault, people with disabilities often face barriers accessing the criminal justice system and other support services. For example, people with disabilities may encounter negative attitudes from law enforcement or service providers, who may not believe their claims or take their allegations seriously. This can make it difficult to obtain justice or support.

This funding will allow DRM to hire an advocate that will directly represent people with disabilities experiencing these barriers, ensuring that they receive the support and resources they need to heal and recover.

In addition, this advocate will work across programs to ensure all DRM advocates and attorneys are aware of the disproportionate risk to their clients, train DRM staff on providing a trauma-informed approach to advocacy, participate in current coalitions and cohorts working to end sexual violence, and continue to bring the disability perspective into the sexual violence prevention and response conversation in Maine.

LD 566 is a crucial step towards ensuring that survivors of sexual violence with disabilities receive the support and resources they need to heal and recover.

Sincerely,

Katrina Ringrose  
Deputy Director

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<sup>1</sup> Sobsey, D., Doe, T. (1991). Patterns of sexual abuse and assault. *Sexuality and Disability*, 9(3), 243-259