



**Testimony of Donna Brown**  
**Speaking in Favor For**  
**LD 566, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services**  
**Date of Public Hearing: March 27, 2023**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today. My name is Donna Brown. I am a citizen of the Penobscot Nation and serve as the Executive Director of the Wabanaki Women's Coalition. I stand before you to present testimony in favor of LD566, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.

The Wabanaki Women's Coalition was recognized by the IRS as a nonprofit charitable organization on October 2, 2013. The Coalition was first awarded an Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) Grants to Tribal Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault Coalitions on October 1, 2014. These grants are only open to OVW acknowledged non-profit Tribal Coalitions. Currently there are nineteen (19) OVW funded Tribal Coalitions across the country. The Wabanaki Women's Coalition is a dual sexual and domestic violence Coalition. Our purpose is in our mission statement which is "To increase the capacity of tribal communities to respond to domestic and sexual violence and influence tribal, national and regional systems to increase awareness, safety, justice, and healing for all our relations." We provide technical assistance, training and resources to the five Wabanaki Advocacy Centers. They are the Maliseet, Mi'kmaq Nation, Indian Township Passamaquoddy, Pleasant Point Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Nation Domestic and Sexual Violence Advocacy Centers. The Advocacy Centers provide services for all survivors regardless if they live on or off the reservation/throughout the state of Maine.

The Wabanaki Women's Coalition is the Tribal equivalent of MCEDV and MECASA, and our member Advocacy Centers are the Tribal equivalents of MCEDV member Domestic Violence Resource Centers and MECASA member Sexual Violence Response Centers.

According to the most recent statistics that were published by the Department of Justice in 2016: \* 84.3% of American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced (more than 4 in 5) have experienced intimate partner violence, sexual violence or stalking in their lifetimes;

\* 56.1% of AI/AN women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes;

\* 27.5% of AI/AN men have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes;

\* Author, Researcher and Professor Sarah Deer, Citizen of the Muscogee Creek Nation states in the documentary, “A Broken Trust: Sexual Assault on Tribal Lands,” – “More than ½ of American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. They are the racial group most likely to be raped in the U.S... When you talk to Native women who have lived their whole lives on a reservation and they say, ‘I can’t think of anyone, any woman that I know who hasn’t been victimized in this way.’ Native women have told me that what you do when you raise a daughter in this environment is you prepare her for what to do when she is raped. Not if, but when.”

Currently, the Wabanaki Women’s Coalition is 100% funded by OVW’s Grants to Tribal Coalitions which includes two fulltime staff members including myself and an Outreach Coordinator, as well as contractors who provide bookkeeping and web hosting services. Both full-time staff members provide training, technical assistance and various forms of support including culturally specific services to its 5 member programs consisting of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Advocacy Centers in each tribal community. We assist with tribal code revisions, serve on the Commission for Domestic and Sexual Abuse and also serve on a variety of task forces and work groups within Maine. We also organize and conduct an Annual Survivors Retreat, Sexual Assault Institute and Tribal Leadership Summit to bring awareness and education on various issues, legislation and best practices regarding serving survivors of sexual assault.

If this bill should pass, it would provide funding for the Wabanaki Women’s Coalition to hire a dedicated Sexual Assault Trainer who would provide training to the 5 Wabanaki Advocacy Centers as well as provide technical assistance, assist with awareness/educational events and community outreach. While the WWC currently provides these services, the hiring of an additional staff member would be able to increase our capacity to provide more individualized support, as well as training and outreach opportunities. The WWC would plan to retain its current bookkeeper for its OVW grant funding so the passing of this bill would also provide funding to hire a dedicated bookkeeper that would solely be responsible for providing such services specific to this funding.

In conclusion, the Wabanaki Women’s Coalition is in support of LD566 and is thankful for the opportunity to highlight the disproportionate impact of sexual violence amongst Native Americans and why the passing of this bill is crucial to increase our capacity to serve our tribal communities.

Thank you/Woliwon,

Donna Brown, MSW

Executive Director

Wabanaki Women’s Coalition

Sources:

A Broken Trust: Sexual Assault on Tribal Lands (October 2019). Directors Maren Machles and Carrie Cochran. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-slFVM4ECUk>

Rosay (2016). *Violence Against AI/AN Women and Men: 2010 Findings from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey*. US DOJ.