



Holly Stover

71 Dover Rd.

Boothbay, ME 04537

Phone: (207) 633-5979

Holly.Stover@legislature.maine.gov

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION

AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Testimony of Representative Holly B. Stover presenting

LD 816, An Act to Provide Integrated Behavioral Health Services to Sexual Assault Survivors

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Holly Stover, and I represent the Towns of Boothbay, Boothbay Harbor, Edgecomb, Southport, South Bristol and Westport Island. I am pleased to present **LD 816, An Act to Provide Integrated Behavioral Health Services to Sexual Assault Survivors**.

Sexual Assault Support Centers and Children's Advocacy Center Staff report that 85 to 95 percent of their clients seek mental health support but have barriers to accessing adequate services. This indicated a need for more trained professionals in Maine to eliminate delays and waitlists by having trauma-trained clinicians ready and available to work with survivors. There is also a need to reduce cost-prohibitive copays for some insurances that require reporting the survivor's diagnosis.

LD 816 would fund a pilot program of four positions across the state to provide direct services to survivors at Sexual Assault Support Centers and Children's Advocacy Centers. These professionals would be trained to handle victims of sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual violence and related trauma or receive training after being hired. To do this, the bill will provide a General Fund appropriation of \$100,000 in FY24 and an ongoing appropriation of \$775,000 in FY25.

In Maine, an estimated one in five women and one in four men have experienced unwelcome or forceful sexual contact in their lifetime. This can lead to damaging trauma and outcomes for a survivor. The impact of post-traumatic stress, and responses to sexual trauma can result in mild to truly debilitating mental health impacts to a victim, including but not limited to depression, anxiety, eating disorders and substance use disorders. These should be viewed as the way survivors manage trauma, yet all too often, they are pathologized in traditional mental health settings.

It may not surprise any of you to hear that Maine is experiencing a shortage of mental health clinicians and providers of mental health services. This shortage directly impacts survivors of sexual assault who have limited to no access to mental health treatment services.

The Children's Advocacy Centers report that children are on waitlists for 9 months or more to be seen by a mental health clinician after disclosure of child sexual abuse. We know that the right amount of treatment at the right time is a determinant of healing after horrific abuse and trauma.

The 2022 Governors' Advisory Council on Military Sexual Trauma report recommended increasing access to behavioral health providers. The report also recommended "to propose legislation that allows VA services to

District 48: Boothbay, Boothbay Harbor, Edgecomb, South Bristol, Southport and Westport Island

currently serving members” related to mental health services. It cites reimbursement issues with military health insurance that are a barrier for veterans needing mental health services.

We can and must do better in ensuring timely and appropriate mental health services for our children who are survivors of sexual trauma. Most importantly, we can reduce the stigma and shame that survivors face when seeking mental health services.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions.