

March 27, 2023

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

My name is Steven Rappold, and I am submitting testimony today **in support LD 1092, "An Act to Prevent the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the State."** Many thanks to Representative Stover for introducing this bill.

I am a Detective with the Town of Gorham Maine. I have been in Law Enforcement going on 23 years. Over the course of my career, I have seen many changes occurring in how law enforcement investigates reports of sexual assault. The approach of how we investigate differs a little bit depending on if we are investigating the report of a sexual assault of an adult or a juvenile. Both are extremely important, and will be handled with the greatest respect with a trauma informed approach, and also with empathy and understanding. The ultimate goal of a successful prosecution is the same, but investigating an exploitation case involving a minor is inherently different because the child's brain is not fully developed. Therefore, it is very important we (as investigators) approach the interviews, and investigation, in a manner that does not cause unnecessary trauma to the child.

In terms of sexual exploitation of children, I have noticed a pretty steep increase in the number of cases with juveniles involved being reported. Prior to the introduction of Cumberland County Children's Advocacy Center (commonly referred to as the CCAC), the way we investigated was different. This way unintentionally caused more trauma than intended because it required a child to tell their story multiple times. First, a patrol officer working a particular shift would take an initial report having the victim tell the details, then a Detective would come in the next day to schedule another interview and ask the details again, to include any additional information. After that, the District Attorneys would get involved and might need more questions asked. This way of investigating was not to the fault of any agency and/or any officers involved, it was due to the lack of training, education, and knowledge of trauma.

When the Children's Advocacy Center was formed and the commercial exploitation of children (CSEC) coordinator was hired, we developed a better way to obtain the necessary details important to develop probable cause to make an arrest. At the CAC, an interview is conducted

one time with a non-leading style of questioning. The CAC model is very important to a successful investigation. After experiencing this way of investigating, I cannot imagine any other way of proceeding. The CAC and CSEC Coordinator are an invaluable resource that creates a more positive and child-friendly approach.

I can say that I have built a really good working relationship with all staff at the CAC, and together I truly believe we are making a positive impact. I have been fortunate to be trained in the trauma informed approach, and I am one of only of a couple male officers that I know of that has completed the Sexual Assault Forensic Examination (SAFE) course. Having these trainings, I know just how important it is to have this collaboration with all involved to include the CAC, DHHS, and the CSEC coordinator. I am also actively involved in investigating child sexual abuse material more commonly referred to as CSAM. I have found that a major nexus to the exploitation of minors is many social medial platforms. With the help from the CSEC coordinator in Cumberland County, we have started a conversation about how to approach these growing concerns.

I strongly encourage you to join our commitment to help fight to stop child sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation of minors. By supporting this bill, you will allow us to expand CSEC Coordinator coverage statewide which will better support children who are sexually exploited and support prosecution for those responsible. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.