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***Testimony of Representative Holly B. Stover in support of
LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary***

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. I am Representative Holly Stover and I serve House District 48 and the communities of Boothbay, Boothbay Harbor, Edgecomb, South Bristol, Southport, and Westport Island. I am here today to speak in support of *LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes*.

I stand before you today to emphasize the critical role that VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) funding plays in supporting Mainers. The proposed reduction of \$5.9 million would severely affect the essential services provided to thousands of victims across the state. Adequate funding is crucial for supporting individuals who have experienced crime and ensuring they receive the necessary assistance and support. The responsibility to ensure this happens lies in our hands.

A \$5.9 million cut in VOCA funding would be catastrophic for victims of crime in Maine. It would inevitably lead to reduced services, leaving vulnerable individuals without the support they desperately need during their darkest moments. The consequences of such a funding decrease would be felt not only by the victims but also by our communities as a whole, as the ripple effects of unaddressed trauma can extend far and wide.

In my past role as the VOCA administrator for the State of Maine, I gained valuable insights. I witnessed firsthand the support these safety net programs provide. Victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, in particular, rely on VOCA-funded programs for services such as counseling, legal support, emergency shelter, housing, and court advocacy. These services are lifelines for survivors, helping them rebuild their lives and navigate the challenging aftermath of such heinous and traumatic experiences.

Moreover, the impact of VOCA funding extends beyond immediate crisis intervention. It plays a pivotal role in addressing the long-term consequences of crime, ensuring that victims receive the ongoing support they need to overcome trauma and regain a sense of security.

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

In cases of homicide, VOCA funding is instrumental in assisting the families left devastated by the loss of a loved one. This includes funeral expenses, grief counseling, and other crucial services that help survivors cope with their emotional and financial burdens.

I understand the critical nature of these services and supports as a survivor of a domestic violence homicide involving my Aunt, my father's sister. Although there were no services like the ones available today, my parents sought and paid for support for my adopted brother, a child who was a witness to his own mother's murder by a man who claimed to love her. It took many years and various types of support to help him heal and for my family to understand what had happened. The services and supports offered today through VOCA-funded services would have been immensely beneficial.

The absence or reduction of services could have a deleterious impact on victims, leaving them without adequate support to deal with the short and longer-term impacts of trauma. If these cuts were to occur, it could have severe consequences for the infrastructure supporting victims of interpersonal violence, leading to a reduction in services, support programs, and resources available to those in need. This, in turn, could impact the overall well-being and recovery of individuals who have experienced trauma and been victims of a crime.

I have collaborated with advocates and providers across the state, including the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Victim Witness Advocates in both the Attorney General and District Attorney's office, Legal Services for the Elderly, and the Children's Advocacy Centers. VOCA funding has been the fundamental structure that enables crucial services to victims of various crimes. These services are indispensable in providing support, healing, and justice to those who have experienced trauma as victims of crime.

I implore you to join me in advocating for the restoration of full funding for VOCA in Maine. Our ability to serve and support victims of crime depends on the continuation of funding through our state resources. Together, we can ensure that the most vulnerable among us receive the care and assistance they need to heal and rebuild their lives.

Concerned individuals and organizations need to advocate for the importance of replacing funding for victim support services. We must be cognizant of the potential consequences of these federal cuts and take important steps to address these gaps through state-funded resources.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.