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THE MAINE SENATE
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Testimony of Senator Richard A. Bennett
LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes
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Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I am pleased to speak in support of LD 2084, “An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.”

Being the victim of a crime is traumatic. We should do all we can to help victims recover and live their lives successfully. Victim resource centers play an integral role in our society. Until the day that crime is completely eliminated, these services will be necessary.

Domestic Violence:

I represent towns served by two of Maine’s domestic violence resource centers, Through These Doors and Safe Voices. Combined, these two agencies served more than 5,500 survivors of domestic abuse and violence last year, representing 63% of all survivors who were served by centers across the state.

Through These Doors has a Lakes Region outreach office, to ensure that survivors in rural Cumberland and Oxford Counties have timely access to services without having to travel to Portland or Lewiston. This includes court advocacy services.

Similarly, in Oxford County, VOCA funding supports rural advocacy services for those who seek justice through our legal systems in the South Paris District Court. VOCA funding has allowed these programs to structure their services such that they were able to have almost 11,000 face to face contacts with survivors who needed help.

Children’s Advocacy Centers:

There are also two Children’s Advocacy Centers in my district—the Cumberland County Children’s Advocacy Center and the Children's Advocacy Center of Androscoggin, Franklin & Oxford Counties. These two centers alone served over 1,000 clients last year and conducted 586 forensic interviews of children. They also completed 1,366 hours of family advocacy.

This means that hundreds of families were supported at the critical time when their child was going through something awful. The CACs also support holding those who harm children accountable because the interviews can be used as evidence in criminal and civil cases based on a bill I co-sponsored and that this committee supported last year.

Legal Services for the Elderly:

Another important issue for me is making sure that the elderly in my community are supported and protected. In my district alone, Legal Services for the Elderly also represented over a hundred people last year.

I urge this committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD 2084 and protect these vital services.