



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier in support of*  
**LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary*

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Kristen Cloutier and I represent House District 94, which includes part of my hometown of Lewiston. I am pleased to cosponsor **LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes**.

Many of us will never have to think about how to go about recovering a loved one's remains from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner or what resources we might have available to help us pay for an unexpected funeral we can't afford, all while we process that someone we love has been tragically murdered. We are lucky that, in our state, we have people who do think about these things every day, and who help families affected by such tragedy navigate their way through some of the darkest hours of their lives. In the aftermath of the mass shooting in my community in October, I have learned so much about this victim service response, and I'd like to share that with you today.

In the early morning of October 26<sup>th</sup>, as many across Maine were waking up to the tragic news, and many neighboring communities were still sheltering in place, the first victim advocates from the homicide team at the Office of the Attorney General were arriving in Lewiston. In the hours and days that followed, more than 200 people needed their help. This included not only those family members of the 18 who lost their lives, but also those who were also physically injured and receiving medical care, and those who witnessed the murder of their family, friends and neighbors.

In the immediate aftermath, what was needed was a victim services crisis response. The homicide victim services team played a critical role: meeting victims wherever they were at, including the hospital; arranging for and funding ASL interpretation for Maine's deaf community; helping family members recover not only their family member's remains, but also cell phones, jewelry and cars; accessing funds available to help with unexpected funeral expenses through the Victim Compensation Program; and organizing pro bono legal supports to

help with things like guardianships and access to bank accounts. These are just a few of the needs that were supported in the immediate aftermath – needs that continue to be supported by Maine’s victim services response network.

And such a massive response needs coordination to be effective. The Director of Victim Services, at the Office of the Attorney General, an entirely Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)-funded position, activated almost every aspect of Maine’s victim services network across the state to pull partners together to support the Family Assistance Center and Maine Resiliency Center efforts in Lewiston. This was not only the homicide victim witness advocates in the attorney general’s office, it also included attorneys from Pine Tree Legal Assistance and Disability Rights of Maine; advocates from Safe Voices Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine and the Immigrant Resource Center of Maine; and victim witness advocates from Maine’s prosecutorial districts statewide.

Each one of these organizations could do what they did, and can continue to provide support to victims and their families, because of the funding they receive through the federal VOCA. They are able to coordinate their services, to be called upon in this way, as part of a true mass-crisis response, because of the foundation that VOCA funding provides. The extent to which Maine’s victim services providers will be able to continue this essential work with victims and their families will depend on the Maine Legislature taking the necessary steps to fill the gaps in federal VOCA funding that we know are coming.

Seldom can we predict when a tragedy will strike, but when it does, it is our responsibility to provide help to those in need. LD 2084 would allocate \$6 million in funding over 2024-2025 to account for the known cuts that are coming to Maine’s Victim Assistance Allocation through VOCA to ensure that victims, survivors and their families receive critical support while navigating the most difficult moments of their lives.

The recent tragedy in Lewiston provides a clear example of how these funds are used to help our neighbors and why the ongoing funding of our victim services response is essential.

Thank you for your time and consideration.