

131st Legislature  
**Senate of Maine**  
Senate District 29

Senator Anne Carney  
3 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333  
Office: (207) 287-1515  
Anne.Carney@legislature.maine.gov

Judiciary Committee, Chair  
Environment and Natural Resources Committee

*Testimony of Senator Anne Carney introducing*  
LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary*  
January 23, 2024

Representative Moonen and Esteemed colleagues on the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, as you know, I am Anne Carney, proudly representing Senate District 29, which includes South Portland, Cape Elizabeth, and part of Scarborough. Today I am pleased to introduce LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.

We often hear about improvements or changes that need to be made to systems. We don't often get to hear about systems that are working. Today you will get to hear about an incredible network of victim services that are supporting thousands of survivors of violent crime each year in Maine. Our task today is relatively simple, we do not need to resolve or improve or fix these systems, we simply need to support their continued existence.

The Victims of Crime Act, or VOCA, is funded with federal criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalties, and special assessments collected by U.S. Attorneys' Offices, federal courts, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. These are pooled and distributed to states based on a formula.

Many other states have made large general fund investments to support basic victim services infrastructure, and use this money to supplement and pay for additional victim services projects. But, in Maine, VOCA represents the core funding source for most victim services agencies and provides basic and essential victim services. Today, these basic services are at risk. LD 2084 would prevent the catastrophic cuts to victim services that will occur if we do not step in to help.

Federal VOCA funding has decreased over the past few years across the country. The Department of Health and Human Services, who distributes VOCA funds in Maine, had been able to keep local providers whole though a combination

131st Legislature  
**Senate of Maine**  
Senate District 29

Senator Anne Carney  
3 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333  
Office: (207) 287-1515  
Anne.Carney@legislature.maine.gov

Judiciary Committee, Chair

Environment and Natural Resources Committee

of saved VOCA funds and other federal funds, but as of October of this year they have indicated will not be able to supplement the federal funding they receive. The expected federal funding they will have to distribute will be about 60% less than what was distributed this year. **To be clear, if the state does not supplement VOCA funds, there will be substantial across the board cuts to victim services in Maine.**

The largest recipient of VOCA funds is the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence and the local domestic violence agencies in each of your local communities. These are the advocates that help domestic violence survivors plan for their safety when they are physically attacked in their own homes and in your communities and help them access shelters and court systems to keep them safe. If these VOCA cuts happen, it will impact the 24/7 domestic violence helpline, shelters, and court supports throughout the state. It will result in the closure of only two shelters available specifically for trafficking survivors in the state.

The second largest recipient of VOCA funds is the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the local sexual assault centers and Children's Advocacy Centers in your communities. These advocates respond to helpline calls 24/7, accompany sexual assault survivors to the hospital to get forensic examinations and to civil and criminal proceedings, provide one-to-one support, and hold support groups. The Children's Advocacy Centers are where children who have experienced sexual abuse go for forensic interviews and to be connected to services. Based on a bill that this Committee supported in the first session, Children's Advocacy Centers are conducting interviews that are being used as evidence to hold those who have sexually abused children accountable. Children's Advocacy Centers are at risk of losing more than half of their already small staff unless we step in.

The third largest recipient of VOCA funds is Pine Tree Legal Assistance, specifically the attorneys who represent domestic and sexual violence survivors. Prior to VOCA funded attorneys at Pine Tree, only a small, Southern area of the state had funding for crime victims to be represented in protection from abuse, family matter, and Title IX cases. Pine Tree now offers statewide representation

*131st Legislature*  
**Senate of Maine**  
*Senate District 29*

*Senator Anne Carney*  
*3 State House Station*  
*Augusta, ME 04333*  
*Office: (207) 287-1515*  
*Anne.Carney@legislature.maine.gov*

*Judiciary Committee, Chair*  
*Environment and Natural Resources Committee*

from Presque Isle to Portland for domestic and sexual violence survivors. This expansion to the more rural areas of the state is at risk with cuts to VOCA funding.

In addition to these three largest recipients, VOCA funding also funds court appointed special advocates in child protective cases in the Judicial Branch, services for elders in our community through Legal Services for the Elderly and the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine, and for a variety of crime victims through Victim Witness Advocates at the Attorney General's Office, the Department of Corrections, and in local District Attorney's offices.

This committee and the Maine Legislature are responsible for so many life-changing, and some cases life-saving, laws which have helped create a new reality for victims of crime; many of these laws have become models for other states. Most of those initiatives were supported unanimously, or near unanimously by this committee. But it is our victim service providers who ensure victims are aware of the vital services available through these laws and support victims' use of them.

If you are wondering if this is truly a crisis, the answer is yes. Maine faces a cut of more than 60% to our core VOCA-funded services. And if you are wondering about a federal solution to this funding problem, please know that MCEDV, MECASA and others have worked closely with the four members of our Congressional delegation over the last four years and while they have done everything they can. I personally have asked the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention to work with Congress to resolve the crisis. They are trying, but Congress as a whole has not stepped up to address this issue.

All of our neighboring New England states has also faced this crisis; each and every one of them has stepped in to provide funds to address the VOCA cuts. We must step up and prevent this looming crisis.

I need not remind you that Maine suffered a mass shooting in Lewiston in October. Today you will hear how our existing VOCA-funded support structure provided and continues to provide needed support to the many Mainers and

*131st Legislature*  
**Senate of Maine**  
*Senate District 29*

*Senator Anne Carney*  
*3 State House Station*  
*Augusta, ME 04333*  
*Office: (207) 287-1515*  
*Anne.Carney@legislature.maine.gov*

*Judiciary Committee, Chair*  
*Environment and Natural Resources Committee*

He informed me he won a national citation at the National Athletic Directors Convention in Orlando. Livingston was honored for his contributions in interscholastic athletics at the local, state and national levels -- and the Bruce Whitehead award was won a few years back. families harmed in that shooting. People from all walks of life—survivors of violent crime, advocates whose work is VOCA funded, and community partners who rely on these VOCA funded services – will speak t you about these services. You will learn about the incredible need for VOCA-funded services and how essential it is that we preserve Maine’s existing structure that supports crime victims.

I urge you to vote Ought To Pass on LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes. Thank you for your time and consideration today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Anne Carney**  
State Senator, Senate District 29  
*South Portland, Cape Elizabeth, and part of Scarborough*