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Testimony in Support of L.D. 2084, *An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes*

January 23, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Aaron Frey, I live in Bangor, and I have the privilege to serve as Maine's Attorney General. I am here today to testify in support of L.D. 2084, *An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes*.

This bill responds to a drastic reduction of federal funds coming into the state from the Victims of Crime Act ("VOCA"). Maine experienced a \$2,000,000 cut for federal fiscal year 2024, and it is expected that Maine will see a cut of \$4,000,000 in federal fiscal year 2025. L.D. 2084 is necessary to ensure our state continues to provide the level of services to victims that they deserve. The Office of the Attorney General ("OAG") is concerned with the potential impact of the cuts to vital services provided to victims by a range of service and resource providers, as well as to victim witness advocacy services provided by my office and other prosecutorial offices across the state.

First, there are a number of service and resource providers who utilize VOCA funds for a range of important services for victims of crime. Organizations like Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, Legal Services for the Elderly, and Pine Tree Legal provide services that support victims as they move forward. The work of these providers is meaningful to those who have been victimized and is in jeopardy because of these cuts.

Second, the OAG receives VOCA funding to support a Victim Witness Advocate ("VWA") coordinator position, which provides training and technical assistance to VWAs across the state, and funding to support three VWAs in the OAG Criminal Division, who work directly with victims to carry out victims' rights services required by statute. Further, a small amount of VOCA funding supports VWA services in six of the eight prosecutorial districts.

With respect to the work of VWAs, responsibilities include providing emotional support for victims throughout the criminal justice process, helping victims make resource referrals and, when appropriate, applications to the Victims Compensation Fund, notifying victims of court dates, preparing victims for trial, and helping victims prepare to testify and give impact statements.

Effective victim services increase efficiency and effectiveness in the criminal justice system. When victims do not have their basic survival and psychological needs met, they often struggle to testify as witnesses, exercise their rights, and appear in court. VWAs help victims address their housing, transportation, childcare, financial, mental health, and substance use treatment needs so they can meaningfully participate in their own case. When crime victims receive the support they need and experience recovery and stability, they are less likely to experience re-victimization and less likely to commit harm to others.

Please vote ought to pass on L.D. 2084.