



**Sagadahoc County
Sheriff's Office**

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LD-2084 An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes

January 23, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Joel Merry, and I am the Sheriff of Sagadahoc County. I am providing testimony today in **Support** of LD-2084.

For the past fifteen years, as Sheriff of Sagadahoc County, I have had the opportunity to work closely with victim services in the southern mid coast area. The relationships we have built between advocates and our deputies has been genuine and collaborative. Our deputies realize they are not the best people to meet the needs of an individual who is suffering from emotional or physical trauma in the immediate aftermath of an event. We count on our advocates to be there, to support victims in their time of need. We have always considered these partner agencies as part of the criminal justice system.

These victim service agencies include domestic violence services, sexual assault services, special advocates for children as well as civil legal representation. A 60% cut in funding for Maine's victim service providers would be devastating to our community's ability to support crime victims.

We recognize domestic violence as a serious problem, and it is essential we have a multi-pronged approach. The availability of community advocates 24/7 is essential. While we may arrest the offender, the victim often has urgent safety concerns and a need for information about what to expect and how to prepare themselves.

If we were to lose the availability to connect victims to the 24-hour hotlines, those crisis calls would be displaced most likely to law enforcement, which is already understaffed and can't respond in the appropriate fashion to fill that gap.

Over the past decade we have seen more collaboration through high risk task forces. The ability of victim services providers to work together as a network and to include law enforcement in that collaboration has made the entire community's response more effective and makes it so that there's no wrong door for a crime victim to get the support and response they need.

If our mission is to protect our communities, and keep our citizens safe, we cannot do it alone. We have come to rely on these victim services, and they provide the necessary assistance so that we can meet our mission.

This reduction in funding will terribly impact the safety net for so many survivors. We must not let that happen. I urge you to pass LD-2084.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel A. Merry', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joel A. Merry, Sheriff