

Testimony of Elise M. Johansen
In Support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crime
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
Tuesday, January 23rd, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Elise Johansen, and I am the Executive Director of Safe Voices, the domestic violence and human sex trafficking resource center serving Franklin, Oxford, and Androscoggin Counties. I am here to ask for your support of LD 2084 because it is how we, as a community, can ensure essential victim services in Maine.

If the State of Maine doesn't find a solution to a 60% funding cut to Maine's largest victim services resource, our victim services response system in Maine will be decimated. The advocates at Safe Voices work with over 2000 individual survivors every single year. Multiply this by the other domestic violence, sexual assault, and district attorney advocates across the state, we are talking about tens of thousands of Mainers. We can barely keep up with the demand for our help as it is, and advocates have to make impossible decisions on a daily basis due to our already limited resources. If we receive a funding cut, in addition to eliminating positions, we are talking about eliminating entire programs. Services that people should be able to depend on will cease to exist. The **only** emergency shelter in Maine that serves survivors of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation **will close as of September 30th**. This resource is in Androscoggin County but people fleeing from trafficking come from all over the state to seek safety will have nowhere for them to go.

Then what?

When we use the word "essential" we mean it. It is *essential* that victims of crime in Maine have access to support. Can you imagine living in fear, working day in and day out to keep yourself and your children safe, and then finally reaching out to a support line -- only to find out there is no help? Today, advocates are accessible 24/7, 365 days a year. We shelter families with no place else to go. We help people file for protection orders and secure attorneys. We connect people to basic needs, like housing, food, and clothing. We assist people in navigating systems that are complex and confusing at the best of times, to say nothing of in the aftermath of trauma. We show up at the hospital. We show up in the court. We show up in the community. We are there when people call us. Which of these will we have to stop, should these cuts be sustained?

The rotten truth is that we exist in a world where some people hurt and harm one another, and whether we have funding available or not, victims exist because those who cause harm exist. Until we live in a world where violence and harm doesn't occur, providing support to victims is **our responsibility**. We must ensure that people in Maine can be safe in their homes, seek shelter when they can't, have access to justice with support, and never have to wonder for one second whether they have what they need to survive.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elise M. Johansen', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Elise M. Johansen

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