



January 24, 2024

**Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee.**

My name is Fatuma Hussein, and I'm the executive director of the Immigrant Resource Center of Maine (IRCM), the only comprehensive, culturally and linguistically specific sexual and domestic violence resource center in Maine.

Since 2003 & 2009, IRCM has been providing culturally specific domestic & sexual violence services, including advocacy, education, and direct victim services such as safety planning, court accompaniment, interpreter and cultural broker services, transportation, medical accompaniment, support groups, referral services for immigration, mental health, medical, housing, financial support and much more for over 20 years now.

Our culturally and linguistically specific DV/SA work continues to be vital because refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrant survivors are disproportionately affected by sexual violence. For instance, many of our New Mainers come from war-torn countries in which sexual violence is weaponized as a tool of war, and while these crimes are foreign to many of you, I've known and seen far too many of these victims and their hardships.

While sexual assault has NO color, ethnicity, cultural background, religion, economic status, or age, immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking survivors must face the added difficulties of coming from communities and cultures where violence against women and children is not only unprotected but a normalized practice that shames survivors into silence in many African cultures. These crimes range from female genital mutilation, sex trafficking, sexual coercion, and forced marriages. These obstacles have led these survivors to face problematic cultural and linguistic barriers to effective services, support systems, and resources while facing continuous toxic shame and trauma with little to no community support.

The IRCM's gender-based violence team and its Multilingual Victim Advocates have provided necessary services, resources, and assistance to help these survivors overcome these cultural and linguistic obstacles to begin the process of healing and growth. Moreover, our Multilingual Advocates equip survivors with the tools to forge an independent path in which they're considered and matter in their new home. Our team's important work fighting against and preventing sexual violence in New Mainer communities is part of a more considerable effort we see from our sister agencies across Maine. More importantly, this incredible work is only possible with the funding we receive from VOCA.

Today, VOCA's funding plays a substantial role in not only our collective efforts to address and fight against sexual and domestic violence across Maine, but it also had a positive impact on supporting our culturally and linguistically specific services and work to meet our survivor's diverse needs. In the last three fiscal year, IRCM has provided domestic & sexual violence services to over 750 survivors through our resilient Gender-Based Violence team in over 10 languages. Our Multilingual Victim Advocates not only provide these important services, but they're changing a very rigid belief system affecting how sexual violence is treated in New Mainer Communities. Consequently, this funding has provided many with the hope that they need to continue the fight against sexual violence that we cannot afford to lose at this crucial time.

I strongly urge you to support this funding request, LD 2084, "An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes," This bill is critical to the continued work, support, and effort we're accomplishing by our staff for survivors throughout Maine.

**We are the change makers. We are the hope. We heal people. We believe in survivors.**

Sincerely,

Fatuma Hussein,  
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