

January 23, 2024

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Melissa Brewer and I am a resident of Winthrop. I am submitting testimony in support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.

I am here today to speak on behalf of my family and as a parent whose child is a victim of sexual harassment and assault. When you find out your child was sexually assaulted, it is a scary and lonely feeling - probably the worst feeling I've ever experienced. It was difficult to even think about how to handle that situation, even as well-educated health professionals. We just didn't have any idea what to do or what our options were.

When I called the Maine Sexual Assault Hotline, I was quickly connected with an advocate at our local center. The immediate comfort, validation, support and advice was beyond anything I ever expected. Our advocate responded to our countless calls and emails, went to many meetings, and communicated with Pine Tree Legal when we weren't getting the support we needed at school. When we felt like the school was trying to sweep it under the rug, resources like the Children Advocacy Center provided us with the direction and support we needed to keep our child safe. They offered a recorded forensic interview so that our child would only have to share the full story one more time and did not have to repeatedly answer similar questions to strangers. Our child has shown so much bravery through this all and is truly a hero in my eyes.

I stand here to tell you that I know my family would not be where we are today without the services of the Sexual Assault Crisis and Support Center, Kennebec/Somerset Children's Advocacy Center and Pine Tree Legal. From the moment of our first interaction and through our ongoing support, my family and I have been able to continue to heal and seek justice for what's happened to our child. For just one example - our advocate helped in getting a referral to Kennebec Behavioral Health and despite their very long waitlist, my child has been able to have three therapy sessions in the last month. I personally cannot imagine what it would be like without them. I know these budget cuts might not feel important to some people, because you never think you or your loved ones will experience these things, but never say never. The unthinkable happened to us, but thankfully, our family was fortunate to have the support when we needed it the most. I can only hope that you will make sure that these services continue to have the funding they need, so every family in our situation can have that same level of support.

Thank you for your time. I ask you to support LD 2084 today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.