

4/10/2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Keely Anderson and I have a business in South Portland, Maine. LD 2290 An Act to Correct Inconsistencies, Conflicts, and Errors in the Laws of Maine.

I have been working as a Licensed clinical professional counselor (LCPC) in Maine for the last four years. My work has primarily revolved around supporting families and children through the healing process after experiencing a traumatic event. I have an extensive background in working with children who have experienced trauma in a wide variety of forms including neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and emotional abuse.

Children who have been sexually abused go through an extensive healing journey after the abuse ends. Each journey is different depending on the support the child is provided with after the abuse. One thing remains the same; each child who survives sexual abuse has worked incredibly hard to let go of the terror and shame to step back into childhood- something that their abusers stole from them.

Asking a child to testify in front of not only their abuser, but a courtroom filled with people they do not know, puts their bodies in a state of fear that jeopardizes the validity, authenticity, and truth of a child's testimony on their trauma narrative. This experience can be severely retraumatizing for the child but also puts them at greater risk for ongoing mental health challenges, increase in symptoms, and revictimization. By asking this of our children, we are doing them a disservice- treating them with disrespect, and putting our children in perpetual danger.

When a child can provide their testimony to trained individuals in a neutral, child-friendly environment (without their abuser present), it greatly minimizes the emotional and physical strain put on the child. It decreases the potential for retraumatization through the utilization of developmentally appropriate strategies and limits the number of times a child will be asked to relive their traumatic experience. The bill that was passed last year; stating that a child's forensic interview could be recorded and utilized as their testimony, is an effective and human way to gather information fairly in these tragic cases. Especially where children have already been subjected to severely traumatic experiences and toxic stress.

This law must be utilized not only for future cases but for any pending cases. It is the job of our community to protect the emotional and physical health of our children.

Sincerely,

Keely Anderson LCPC ATR

