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Testimony of Representative Morgan Rielly introducing
LD 662, An Act to Fund Military Sexual Trauma Liaisons
before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

Good morning Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and fellow members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. I am Morgan Rielly, and I represent House District 127, which includes part of Westbrook. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce **LD 622, An Act to Fund Military Sexual Trauma Liaisons** for your consideration.

I'm coming before this committee a third time to ask you to fund these Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Liaisons. I first spoke before the committee in 2023, then again in 2024. I now come before you a third time. I'm hopeful that together we will secure funding for these positions to support our veterans and Guard members.

The VA's data shows that 1 out of 3 female veterans have experienced MST. There are 10,363 female veterans in the state of Maine, out of 105,658 veterans. With such a large number of veterans in the state, there is a serious need to provide specialized support for those who have experienced MST.

MST liaisons can also support current Guard members in addition to providing support to Maine's veterans. In addition to being supported by the Advisory Council on Military Sexual Trauma, a top recommendation made by the Department of Defense's Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military details the need for military-based advocates to work closely with community-based advocates. The role of MST liaisons is to be that community-based advocate.

As we have learned, some survivors will choose to work with both a Guard advocate and a community advocate and some will choose to work with one or the other, so it is important that Guard advocates know the basics about civil legal rights and resources, Title IX and as well as

Guard services and internal investigation processes. In MENG's past report on MST, the data they included shows possible underreporting among lower enlisted service members.

However, I want to be clear that these positions do not replace nor will they interfere with MENG's Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) work. These positions are purely for support out in the community for veterans who aren't able to access SARCs and for any Guard members who feel the need to reach out to them for additional support.

Organizations like the Sisters in Arms Center (SiAC) and the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA) can be the base of operations for these MST liaisons. Both organizations are here today to talk further about their work. **LD 662** will provide funding for positions at these organizations. This includes one Executive Director, one House Manager, one Administrative Coordinator, one contracted therapist, one National Guard liaison, and part-time per diem coverage. MECASA and SiAC can both discuss further what roles these positions will be performing.

We need to fund these positions because MECASA and SiAC currently don't have the capacity to provide the necessary support for those who have been affected by MST. Both organizations will be able to provide information to this capacity about bandwidth issues and the roles these liaisons will perform.

I urge the members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee to vote in support of **LD 662** and make funding for the MST liaisons a priority.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions.