



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Laurie Osher, PhD

13 Mayo Street
Orono, ME 04473
Phone: (207) 944-6743
Laurie.Osher@legislature.maine.gov

March 20, 2025

Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher in Support of

LD ¹¹⁷~~177~~, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Laurie Osher, and I represent House District 25, the majority of Orono's residents. I am here today to testify in support of **LD ¹¹⁷~~177~~, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.**

Nationwide, 81% of women and 43% of men reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime. These data show that sexual violence disproportionately harms women, but LGBTQ+ people (16+) are nearly 4 times more likely to experience violent victimization, compared to non-LGBT people.

Sexual violence negatively impacts victims' lives, and for some, the physical and emotional scars can last a lifetime. And, as has been made clear to all who saw the documentary film "The Hunting Ground", sexual violence is a significant problem on University campuses. Women ages 18-24 are at an elevated risk of sexual violence; 3-4 time greater risk than women in general. My town of Orono is the home of the University of Maine, where over 12,000 students are enrolled this year. With roughly 5,000 women aged 18-24 living in Orono and/or attending the University of Maine, there are lots of young women who are at risk of being victims of sexual violence. These women and all the people in my district should be able to get services from professional advocates if they become victims of sexual assault.

I know from experience how terrible it is to deal with and recover from the impact of sexual assault without the assistance of a professional advocate. I was stalked and assaulted when I was a college student in upstate New York. At that time, there were no services for survivors of sexual assault available on my college campus or in my college town.

However, if I'd gone to college at UMaine then, I would have been able to get support from Rape Response Services in Bangor. Founded in 1976, Rape Response Services was one of the first organizations in the state providing services for sexual assault survivors. Today it is one of the many local centers in Maine's network of providers. Clearly, in the history of providing these services, "Maine leads". Just as clearly, by not adequately funding these services, Maine is falling behind.

When students or anyone in Maine experiences sexual violence and seeks the assistance of advocates, they deserve to work with experienced professionals. But because of the low pay for these support service specialists, the turnover rate for people in the job is extremely high.

After LD 566, a bill with the same title and goal, was not funded last session (the 131st), 60% of the frontline service workers across the state, those who provide support to sexual assault survivors, left their jobs in search of better paid work. This means that this year, across Maine, local sexual assault support centers have had to devote significantly more time to hiring and training new workers. This is inefficient and is a disservice to those seeking help.

The sustainability of this service and survivor's lives depends on the advocates receiving a wage that is appropriate for the demanding and difficult work they do. This bill raises base salaries at all SASCs to \$45,000 per year and raises salaries throughout the organization commensurately.

This bill also provides funding to allied organizations to better help serve all survivors – by funding SA services at organizations with deep ties to their communities.

I encourage you to support LD ~~177~~ Thank you for your time.

117