

February 24, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Sarah Krajewski and I work as an advocate for Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine.

I am honored to work with survivors of sexual violence to support their safety, guide them through their options for seeking justice, and to witness the healing that can happen when people feel supported through these processes. From the calls I take on the 24-hour Helpline, to trainings I am able to give to our systems partners on topics designed to help improve experiences for survivors, to the support groups I facilitate in Maine's jails, I see advocacy making a difference every day.

I feel grateful that I am able to get up and come to work to do things that are meaningful to my community, work that supports survivors' healing, work that my children can be proud of. I consider myself lucky to get paid to do something that is so much of who I am at my core and that so closely aligns with my beliefs. I get to help people in ways that feel right for them, that empowers them, and that makes my community and my state safer for everyone.

But the reality is that if I didn't have a partner who makes more money than I do, I wouldn't be able to continue to do this vital work that I am so passionate about, work that benefits survivors and systems alike. I have the privilege of being able to choose work that feeds my heart, without needing to worry as much about it feeding my family. But that isn't true of most of my co-workers and it doesn't make me feel valued. It does however feel incredibly dangerous for the future of advocacy.

We as advocates cultivate relationships and build trust with local law enforcement, medical and other systems partners all to improve experiences for survivors, we develop knowledge of and connections with local resources, we lead with a trauma informed lens, and we support survivors as they navigate complex and often broken systems. And eventually most of us get to a point where we can no longer financially afford to continue in this work and are exhausted from the demands and vicarious trauma that come with it. So, we leave and take all those connections, built trust, and knowledge with us.

If I were to leave tomorrow, I would take my experience, training and all the relationships cultivated in my 10 plus years of anti-violence work with me, leaving yet another hole for survivors and the co-workers I would leave behind. This has been happening too much lately. I've seen smart and talented advocates move on to better paid positions in less-demanding fields. I've seen our agencies have to rebuild relationships and spend time training new advocates – time and money we could have been using to better support survivors. Undervaluing sexual assault advocacy is incredibly expensive. This funding would pay for itself

in better outcomes and a more secure advocacy system. Please support this vital work and pass LD 117 today.

Thank you for your time.