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President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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Testimony in Support of LD 117
An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services
Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Mattie Daughtry. I serve as President of the Maine Senate and proudly represent Senate District 23 in the Legislature, which includes Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth. I submit this testimony to express my strong support of LD 117, “An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services.”

LD 117 would provide necessary funding for sexual assault services. This funding is a necessary step in both addressing the staffing crisis these services are facing by raising wages and in addressing the disproportionate impacts of sexual violence by enabling outreach and services for the communities most affected by this violence.

Sexual assault services had a turnover rate of 37% for advocates last year and 70% of current staff that were surveyed said that low pay was the main cause of them wanting to leave their jobs.[1] Only four of the seven centers in Maine that do this work are able to pay their workers a livable wage.[2] Clearly this work is being undervalued and these staff are feeling it. This bill would infuse sorely needed funding into these service providers to ensure that staff gets paid more fairly. More will still need to be done, but we can at least establish a floor for compensation with this funding.

These services are essential because they support some of our most vulnerable neighbors during extremely traumatic times in their lives. 80% of people with developmental disabilities are sexually assaulted at some point in their life and half of those people will experience sexual assault more than 10 times.[3] And 35% of Black women have experienced sexual violence in their life. These statistics illustrate the need for these services and the need for robust training to know the signs and how to address sexual assault with cultural competency when it happens to people from different communities, backgrounds and lived experiences. Victim-centered care in response to sexual violence can be the difference between a good outcome and a bad outcome for vulnerable Mainers. But to provide the training necessary and to hire the professionals needed to carry out this care requires funding.

I urge you to pass this bill and fund these vital services. Sexual assault services workers deserve to earn a livable wage and victims of sexual violence deserve care that is culturally informed and effective in helping them recover from the complex and life-altering impacts of that violence. Thank you for your time.

[1] MECASA fact sheet

[2] MECASA fact sheet

[3] MECASA fact sheet