



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: Maine Relay 711

Lori K. Gramlich

Assistant House Majority Leader
(207) 287-1430

Lori.Gramlich@legislature.maine.gov

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Testimony of Rep. Lori K. Gramlich in support of
LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Lori Gramlich. I have the privilege of representing the lovely seaside community of Old Orchard Beach in House District 131 and the distinct honor of serving as assistant House majority leader. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today as a cosponsor in support of **LD 117, An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services**.

The funding in this bill is absolutely necessary to sustain sexual assault services in Maine. The staff and advocates who work for sexual assault response services are the people on the front lines, working to prevent sexual violence, which remains all too prevalent in our communities. These front-line workers help to ensure that every survivor can access the support they need and deserve. What losing these services would mean to Maine people is almost unimaginable to me, but right now, it's an all-too-real possibility we face.

In 2024 alone, Maine's sexual assault services providers saw a 9% increase in requests for services. As the number of individuals and partner organizations reaching out for support has increased, so has the cost of keeping the doors open and the lights on. We all know how much operational costs like health insurance and utilities have increased for organizations in recent years.

At the same time, sexual assault services are facing a staffing crisis, unable to recruit or retain enough advocates to do this invaluable work. These advocates have difficult, complex jobs with long hours, but right now, their pay does not reflect their hard and incredibly meaningful work.

Together, these factors have made it impossible to sustain these vital services unless we provide additional funding. We must act now. The stakes are simply too high.

As a social worker and a legislator, much of my focus has been on caring for and protecting Maine's kids. To that end, I want to highlight the critically important role of the Children's Advocacy Centers, which would benefit from this funding, in supporting victims of child sexual abuse. Without adequate funding, these centers will be compromised to provide family advocacy support services and the forensic interviews necessary to make this essential work possible. We must do better for these kids.

You will hear from many individuals today who know firsthand the devastating impact of sexual assault and its aftermath, which far too often brings feelings of shame, guilt, fear and helplessness. I stand before the committee today in solidarity with all of them, my fellow survivors. Their courage gives me the strength to share a bit of my own story with you.

When I was a kid, I knew that there was nothing I could do to change what I went through and what my siblings went through. The abuse was horrific. But I promised myself that, when I was a grown up, I would do my best to make things better for others – especially for kids.

Throughout my nearly 40-year career as a social worker, and now as a fourth-term legislator, I have spent my entire adult life working to give voice to the experiences of my fellow survivors. And now, in asking you to support LD 117, I am speaking not only for myself but also on behalf of several of my colleagues in the Legislature – colleagues who are not just proponents of this bill but, like myself, are also survivors of sexual assault.

We are speaking today with one voice when we say that we know firsthand just how critical these services are.

And we speak together when we say that we want all our fellow survivors to hear this message:

You are not defined by the abuse you have experienced.

You deserve to be heard, believed and supported. You deserve justice and healing.

And you deserve to know that we, your elected officials, have your back.

We ask the committee and all our fellow legislators to do just that: Let's have the backs of Maine's survivors and the people who support them when they need it most. Please support LD 117 and provide this critical funding to our sexual assault service centers.

Thank you.