

Testimony of Senator Anne Carney introducing
**LD 1139, “An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for
Victims of Crimes,”**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
Thursday, April 17, 2025

Representative Kuhn and esteemed colleagues on the Committee on Judiciary, I am Senator Anne Carney, proudly representing Senate District 29, which includes South Portland, Cape Elizabeth and part of Scarborough. It is a pleasure to be with you today to introduce LD 1139, “An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.”

We often hear bills urging improvements or changes that need to be made to our court system, our criminal justice system and the like. We don’t often get to hear about systems that are working, but I ask you to reflect on what we already know about Maine’s incredible network of victim services. They support thousands of survivors of violent crime each year, and I hope you are eager to learn more. Our task today is relatively simple. We do not need to improve or fix Maine’s victim services system; we simply need to support its continued existence.

The Victims of Crime Act, or VOCA, has long been funded with federal criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalties and special assessments collected by U.S. Attorneys' Offices, federal courts and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. These funds were pooled and distributed to states based on a formula. Until last year, federal VOCA money was the core funding source for most of Maine’s victim services agencies and paid for basic and essential victim services. But in 2024, as we faced a \$6M reduction in grants under the federal victim assistance formula grant program under VOCA, our state was able to step up to meet the need. Today, these basic services continue to be at risk due to the lack of federal funding. LD 1139 would prevent the catastrophic, across-the-board cuts to victim services that will occur if we do not step in to help.

The largest recipient of VOCA funds is the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence and the local domestic violence agencies in each of your local communities. These are the advocates that help domestic violence survivors plan for their safety when they are physically attacked in their own homes and in your communities. They help survivors access shelters and the court system to keep them safe. If these VOCA cuts happen, it will impact the 24/7 domestic violence helpline, shelters and court supports throughout the state. It will result in the closure of one of only two shelters available specifically for trafficking survivors in the state.

The second largest recipients of VOCA funds are the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA), the local sexual assault centers and Children's Advocacy Centers in your communities. These advocates respond to helpline calls 24/7, accompany sexual assault survivors to the hospital for forensic examinations and to civil and criminal proceedings, provide one-to one support, and hold support groups.

The Children's Advocacy Centers are where children who have experienced sexual abuse go for forensic interviews and to be connected to services. Thanks to the dedication of this committee, Children's Advocacy Centers conduct interviews that are used in evidence to hold those who have sexually abused children accountable. Children's Advocacy Centers are at risk of losing more than half of their already small staff unless we step up with funding.

The third largest recipient of VOCA funds is Pine Tree Legal Assistance (PTLA), specifically the attorneys who represent domestic and sexual violence survivors. VOCA funding has allowed PTLA to provide statewide representation for domestic and sexual violence survivors. Services from Portland to Presque Isle are at risk due to reduced VOCA funding.

VOCA funds also support court-appointed special advocates in child protective cases in the Judicial Branch, services for elders in our community through Legal Services for Maine Elders and the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine, and for a variety of crime victims through Victim Witness Advocates at the Attorney General's Office, at the Department of Corrections, and in local District Attorney's offices.

Today, you will hear from providers and survivors about the incredible need for VOCA-funded services and how essential it is that we preserve Maine's existing structure that supports crime victims. We must continue to ensure victims are aware of the life-changing and life-saving laws we have enacted and that they are supported in accessing those protections.

I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1139, "An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes." Thank you for your time and consideration today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



Anne Carney
State Senator, District 29