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*Testimony of Representative Holly B. Stover presenting*

## **LD 2168, An Act to Increase Accountability for Persons Engaged in Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking and to Support Victims**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary*

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Representative Holly Stover, and I am honored to represent House District 48. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce **LD 2168, An Act to Increase Accountability for Persons Engaged in Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking and to Support Victims**.

In my professional career, I have had the opportunity to advocate for and provide services to survivors, including during my time as the state's Director of Domestic and Sexual Violence. Through that work, I know all too well that these crimes happen right here in our state, in all our communities, even though they are often unreported and underrecognized.

Human trafficking and sexual exploitation are currently in the headlines in Maine and nationally nearly every day. Public awareness of these unspeakable crimes is at an all-time high. And we are also witnessing the struggles of survivors, many of whom have had to fight seemingly endless battles just to be heard and believed.

LD 2168 is an opportunity for us as lawmakers to stand up for these survivors of sexual violence and to ensure they have access to the support they need. It creates a mechanism to hold perpetrators accountable for the harms they have caused while also securing necessary funding to help survivors begin the long, difficult process of recovery and healing.

The bill requires an additional assessment to be imposed on those convicted of certain sex crimes. The assessment would be \$500 for first-time offenders and \$1,000 for repeat offenders. The intent is for the funds collected to directly benefit victims of these same crimes through the state's existing Victims' Compensation Fund.

Specifically, the crimes included in the bill are the following:

- Engaging a person for prostitution;
- Sex trafficking;
- Aggravated sex trafficking;
- Soliciting a child for commercial sexual exploitation; and,
- Commercial sexual exploitation of a minor or a person with a mental disability.

These are truly atrocious crimes for one human being to commit against another, crimes that cause enduring harm and suffering that stay with survivors for the rest of their lives.

As members of the committee know, the Maine Victims' Compensation Program offers financial assistance to victims of violent crimes in recognition of the lasting physical and emotional injuries they have endured. The fund covers such expenses as counseling, lost wages and medical expenses that are not covered by insurance, providing crucial financial support at a time when survivors need it most.

To be clear, this is just one piece of the continuum of ongoing, survivor-centered care and services that are critically important and deserve our attention as policymakers. But we know that funds collected because of this bill would go a long way toward helping to ease the financial burden and hardship that survivors suffer.

Like many of you, I was fortunate enough to know and serve alongside the late Honorable Lois Reckitt, who worked tirelessly to end the exploitation and trafficking of Maine people. As I have worked to develop the proposal before you today, I have been inspired by Lois and think of her frequently. I was proud to support the survivor-centered legislation she sponsored when she served in the Legislature. I truly hope that we can come together to further this important work in her memory – and in honor of all survivors.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me, and I look forward to working with stakeholders to refine and strengthen this proposal.