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Executive Director

55 Portland Street

Portland, ME 04101

207.775.0026

info@preblestreet.org

www.preblestreet.org



United Way
of Southern Maine



Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Hailey Virusso, and I am the director of Anti-Trafficking Services at Preble Street. The mission of Preble Street is to provide accessible, barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty, and to advocate for solutions to these problems. As Maine's largest dedicated anti-trafficking program, we serve over 100 survivors of trafficking across the state each year, working alongside them as they reclaim their lives.

I am here today to urge you to support LD 2136, a bill that would fill a critical funding gap on a one-time basis to support adult survivors of human trafficking in Maine. Since 2013, our program has relied upon federal funding from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) to provide case management to survivors of trafficking and assist them with meeting their basic needs. Typically, applications for this funding open in April, but in 2025, the call for applications was delayed without explanation until the end of December. This disruption to the standard grant cycle forced us to significantly scale back the services we can provide and implement a waitlist, which is not our usual practice. This waitlist has averaged about 20 survivors since October 2025.

OVC grant funding has had a positive impact on the lives of so many of the survivors we serve. During our most recent three-year OVC grant, which ended in September of last year, we served 157 survivors of trafficking across 7 Maine counties. During the same period, we received nearly 350 program referrals, indicating that this funding source alone supported 45% of the survivors we served.

In addition to covering staff time, we also allocate OVC funds toward relocation costs, rental assistance, food, clothing, and mental health services for survivors. Because traffickers leverage their victims' unmet basic needs to keep them trapped in exploitative situations, it is critical that our team be able to support survivors in accessing food, shelter, and other necessities outside of a trafficking victimization. When our most recent OVC grant ended in September, we lost the ability to provide that kind of support to many of our clients. Human trafficking is an economic crime, robbing people of their freedoms and opportunity to financial security. It is imperative that we can meet those needs while working alongside survivors to support them in stabilizing their lives.

I'd like to share just one of many examples of the impact of this loss of critical federal funding. Our program was unable to provide transportation assistance to a survivor working toward independence. As a result, she missed a scheduled job interview—an opportunity that could have moved her closer to financial stability and long-term safety. Public transportation and walking were not viable options due to serious safety concerns in her community, leaving her with no safe way to attend the interview. This single gap in services illustrates how funding cuts create immediate, real-world barriers for survivors of trafficking, undermining their ability to secure employment and rebuild their lives.

One-time funding through LD 2136 would enable us to continue supporting survivors of human trafficking despite the federal funding lapse. We urge you to pass this legislation so that Maine survivors can continue to find dignity, safety, and healing.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.