

mecasa

**MAINE COALITION AGAINST
SEXUAL ASSAULT**

Senators Rotundo and Carney, Representatives Gattine and Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Judiciary:

My name is Elizabeth Ward Saxl, and I am submitting testimony in favor of LD 2212 on behalf of the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the organization which represents and serves Maine's sexual violence prevention and response programs as well as Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers.

Our member sexual assault support centers strongly urge you to add \$3 million for Civil Legal Services Fund in the second year of the biennial budget, in order to avoid a budgetary cliff for the providers starting July 1.

Each year, 19,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.¹ Yet of those 19,000 Mainers, only three percent report to law enforcement, and so one of the only paths to justice and safety for the thousands of remaining survivors is accessing civil legal protections.

The good news is that every day, our friends at Pine Tree, LSE, Maine Equal Justice, the Volunteer Lawyers' Project, Disability Rights Maine, ILAP, the Clinics at Maine Law, and the Maine Justice Foundation provide high-quality legal assistance to your constituents across the state.

Also in the good news column is that the attorneys who primarily represent sexual violence victims/survivors are extraordinary – they are deeply knowledgeable about the range of protections available for victims and their practice is sensitive and trauma-informed.

¹ Dumont, R. & Shaler, G. (2015). *Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities*. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

Legal aid attorneys support hundreds of sexual assault survivors every year.

Legal aid supports high school and college students through complex Title IX issues after they have been sexually assaulted by another student. This allows these students to continue attending classes as well as being able to continue with after-school activities like sports and to participate fully in special occasions such as prom and graduation by advocating for specific safety plans to help student survivors continue to fully access their education.

Legal aid supports tenants from being evicted for refusing to have sex with their landlords.

Legal aid supports the families of child victims of sexual violence to obtain protection from further abuse through the civil legal system.

Legal aid supports victims with intellectual disabilities in obtaining court-ordered protection resulting in their increased safety.

Without civil legal providers, these survivors would be without representation – they would leave school, be evicted, and be subject to continued sexual violence.

The bad news is that many victims are going unrepresented. We need more staff at Maine's legal services organizations, not fewer.

On a personal note, my husband Mike and I believe, heart and soul, in the life changing services these entities provide and as a result, every year, make the Campaign for Justice, which funds these agencies, our highest charitable giving priority – at a rate many times more than what we donate to the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, an organization which we also think does great work.

I would urge you to join us in our commitment to provide ongoing funding to these organizations to ensure these critical services continue beyond July 1.