

mecasa

MAINE COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

February 27, 2026

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 today on behalf of the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA), the organization which represents and serves Maine's sexual violence prevention and response programs as well as Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers. MECASA initiates and advocates for victim-centered public policy; provides expert training, technical assistance, and resources for providers and partners; and funds the service providers in your communities.

MECASA is here today to testify in **support of LD 2212, An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027.**

We are deeply grateful for the funding these two committees made possible last session.

We heard from advocates and children's advocacy center staff in exit interviews, and from those considering leaving the field, that the top reason they were leaving, or considering leaving, was pay – it was not burnout from working every day to support Mainers in the aftermath of what might be the worst experience of their lives, not burnout from advocates being on call 24-7 and going to the ER in the middle of the night, not burnout from CAC staff day in and day out interviewing children about the sexual abuse they have endured.

It was pay. Sexual assault support center and CAC staff were taking on second and third jobs to stay in the field they loved, or were leaving for higher pay to work in adjacent fields like child protective.

The funding you all provided helped bring most staff from salaries in the \$30,000s to a wage floor of \$45,000/year which completely stabilized our critical workforce. Two sessions ago, when this ask was

not funded in the final hours of the session, we lost 60% of our workforce – today our turnover is under 20% and morale is high as a result of your support.

We know this matters to you – over 100 people provided testimony in support of the advocate wage bill in the Health and Human Services Committee, these initiatives received unanimous reports in the Health and Human Services and Judiciary Committees, top funding priority going to Appropriations, and a unanimous roll call on the House floor. We need you to finish what you started.

I have had the great privilege of supporting these advocates for more than 26 years and this is the most important financial ask I have ever made. We desperately need an ongoing commitment to these funds now – or at the close of this session these advocates will again leave the work they love. These are the skilled, compassionate people who are there every minute of every day for the 19,000 Mainers who experience sexual violence every year.

This won't cost you a dollar in this biennium. We don't need additional funding; what we do need is for you to move this funding into the baseline.

On behalf of the advocates and the survivors they support, I urge you to provide ongoing funding for the VOCA providers and Maine's sexual assault support center advocates and children's advocacy center staff.

Thank you, and I am here to answer any questions you might have.