

SASSMM

Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine

February 25, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and Members of the Judiciary and Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committees:

My name is Arian Clements. I am a resident of Brunswick, a survivor, a parent of two girls in Brunswick schools, and since 2016, the Executive Director of Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine (SASSMM).

I am here 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*, and to **urge that you to amend this section of the budget to include ongoing funding for the Victims of Crime backfill you prioritized last year as well as for the increased sexual assault advocate salaries it also ultimately supported.**

I have worked in sexual assault prevention and response for more than 30 years. During that time, I have watched advocates across Maine deliver essential services to survivors and their families, while working in chronically underfunded systems. We've asked highly skilled professionals to do complex, trauma-filled work, for insufficient wages, resulting in a workforce meant to support survivors, being itself in constant crisis.

As the Executive Director of one of Maine's six Sexual Assault Support Centers, our agencies have lived the consequences of this. Low wages led to burnout, turnover as high as 60%, and the repeated loss of experienced advocates and trusted community relationships. When our advocate salary funding bills were left on the table in 2023 and 2024, more than half of our workforce turned over *statewide*. In 2025, we again testified about the urgent need for wages for advocates. Funding was finally granted, but only on a one-time basis.

That money has already made a measurable difference. With increased investment, centers have seen dramatic reductions in turnover—from as high as 60% down to 15%—along with stronger continuity of care for survivors. Advocates have said things like “this has given me a renewed sense of pride in the work that I do,” and “I feel encouraged to take on new challenges, continue refining my skills, and contribute even more strategically to our goals.”

Many have expressed that without this increase, they wouldn't be able to continue in this career.

This funding is working. But temporary funding produces temporary solutions. Without permanent investment, we will slide backward. Beginning this summer, we will lose experienced advocates, disrupt services, and risk that survivors fall through gaps at the moment they most need support. The 19,000 people who experience sexual violence every year in Maine deserve a system that can give them that support when they need it.

I urge the Committees to help us stop repeating this costly cycle. Making this funding part of the baseline budget will stabilize the workforce, protect critical services, and strengthen Maine's response to sexual violence. It is an investment in public health, community well-being, and survivor safety. The question before you is not whether this funding works—it does. The question is whether Maine will sustain it before the progress we've made is lost. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Arian Clements, Brunswick ME

Executive Director, Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine (SASSMM)

What Higher Wages Mean for Advocates

"We are deeply grateful that our community and our legislators recognize and value the essential work we do."

"The increase in salaries will help us continue to sustain our current staff and to provide the same level of services."

Impact of the Salary Increases Funded by LD 117/LD 1139

"...a renewed sense of pride in the work that I do."

"...it just feels like a reminder that what we do matters and that people are paying attention."

"...being able to recruit and retain more qualified co-workers."

"In my years here, I have experienced exponential levels of turnover. With this increase, we gain stability that helps to offset the amount of time and mental commitment that is required to show up daily for the survivors we serve and the loved ones that walk the healing journey with them."

"It has provided a little more breathing room in my personal budget, and less fear that an issue with my car leads to an expensive repair that might end my ability to do my job."

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"Since receiving this funding, we have successfully filled a full-time position that had remained vacant for several months, and we have seen a noticeable improvement in team morale."

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"I am hopeful for the future and longevity of sexual assault centers to continue to serve our communities through the helpline, education, hospital accompaniments, support groups, assisting survivors in making police reports and protection from abuse orders, and so much more."

**Make this funding ongoing - don't
turn a pay raise into a pay cut!**

"The increase has helped significantly, it has made the work we do feel more sustainable now that we are being fairly compensated."

"...takes a bit of the weight off with the cost of living being what it is right now."

"...a real acknowledgment of the work we do."

"This salary increase communicates to me that the state of Maine has listened to advocates, believes in advocates and wants to support advocates so that we can continue to support Maine survivors of sexual violence."

"Since this funding, we've had little to no turnover, and we have a team of really solid, incredible people who are being compensated for the specialized, supportive, life-changing work they do."

"This ensures that our advocates can continue serving survivors with compassion and professionalism while worrying a little less about how they will support their own families."

"Thank you all so much for your support and trust to keep these valuable services going while paying staff a livable wage."