

January 23, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Gabrielle Cooper and I am a resident of Hampden and an employee of Rape Response Services. I am writing to express my support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.

Sexual assault prevention and support services are a vital resource for survivors and all those affected by violence in Maine. Sexual assault support centers across the state work tirelessly to assist survivors of sexual assault and their loved ones as they process their healing and move through the criminal or civil justice systems, if they wish to pursue this route. Research has shown that survivors have better outcomes and greater resiliency when they have worked with a sexual assault support center. They are less vulnerable to future victimization and less likely to cause harm to others.

It takes many people working in various sectors of victim services to facilitate healing and prevent violence. Sexual assault advocates, domestic violence advocates, Pine Tree Legal Assistance attorneys, victim witness advocates, and many others are all incredibly important parts of this puzzle. When these partners are present and adequately funded, we are better able to provide holistic supports for survivors and affected others.

VOCA funding is vital to so much of this work. Since 1984, it has helped to provide essential support services to victims of crime. Losing over 60% of this funding would devastate victim services in Maine that are already in need of stronger backing. LD 2084 is necessary to prevent such deep cuts to sexual assault advocacy, Children's Advocacy Centers, domestic violence advocacy, shelter and emergency funding for victims of sex trafficking and exploitation, and legal and other supports for elder abuse victims. Maine cannot risk losing these essential resources.

Thank you so much for your time and effort. I urge you to support LD 2084 and take this important step toward addressing and preventing violence in Maine.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle Cooper

Hampden, ME