



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the Committee on
Judiciary**

**In Favor of LD 2084 – An Act to Provide Funding
for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes**

Provided on January 23, 2024

Greetings, Senator Carney, Representative Moonan, and the members of the Committee on Judiciary.

My name is Jena Jones, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 140 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in favor of LD 2084.

Across our state, older Mainers are struggling. Between our persistent workforce challenges, difficulty in accessing care and support services, and the severely limited availability of affordable, reliable housing, older adults are facing challenges remaining housed and connected to their communities perhaps more than ever before. The ramifications of these challenges often lead older adults to become dependent on others for help. Dependency makes us all more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Elder abuse includes physical and sexual violence, neglect, abandonment, financial exploitation, and emotional abuse. Elder abuse is most commonly perpetrated by a family member or friend of the victim. According to the National Council on Aging, two thirds of abuse cases against older adults are committed by adult children or spouses.¹ Elder abuse costs us all billions of dollars each year, and victims of abuse have a 300% higher mortality rate than people who have not experienced abuse.²

While we're all at risk for being victimized in later life if we become dependent on someone for our care, statistics show that older women might be more at risk than others. As found by a 2022 report on the Economic Status of Older Women in Maine, older women are 2 times more likely to live alone than their male counterparts. This means they don't have a live-in caregiver, someone who can help with chores, or someone who can drive them when they can no longer drive.

¹ (National Council on Aging, 2021)

² (National Council on Aging, 2021)

Older women who live alone also have less income than older men who live alone and higher rates of poverty.³ More than half the older women who live alone in Maine don't have enough money to meet their basic needs. Again, this means that lower income older women who cannot afford to pay out of pocket for care, transportation, chores and home repair might be more vulnerable to people offering help who may also want to take advantage.

If an older lower income woman is a victim of crime, she certainly does not have resources available to pay to fix property that has been damaged, seek counseling, or find transitional housing to escape an abuser.

The funding within LD 2084 will ensure that older victims of crime have access to those supports when they are needed. The organizations and institutions that support older victims of abuse, like the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine, rely on these dollars to connect victims to needed services, coordinate transitional housing, and raise awareness of the invisibility of elder abuse. Victims of abuse should be offered a path to justice, something that Maine's Legal Service for the Elderly provides with help from the funding LD 2084 will cover.

Too often older adults are afforded no voice following the acts of abuse that are perpetuated against them, but LD 2084 provides them the opportunities needed to find that voice and the help they need. I urge you to support LD 2084.

Thank you.

Jena Jones

³ (Snow, 2022)