

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Jen Shumway and I am submitting testimony today on behalf of the Cumberland County Children's Advocacy Center. Housed at Spurwink, the Children's Advocacy Center is a collaboration of a team of professionals, including law enforcement, child protection, and prosecution who work together to make decisions about the investigation and management of child sexual abuse cases.

I am here today in support of LD 1092, "An Act to Prevent the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the State."

My role at the Children's Advocacy Center is the CSEC Care Coordinator. CSEC is the acronym used for The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children which is any sexual activity involving a child in exchange for something of value or the promise of something of value, such as food, lodging or drugs and when a child is treated as a commercial and sexual object.

Exploiters and traffickers target vulnerable youth, many of whom have histories of running away, abuse, and neglect. What initially seems like love and security often turns into control, manipulation, and violence, making it difficult for youth to step forward, identify as victims, or seek help. This is an especially challenging population to treat because many youth at risk do not identify as victims or fear for their safety if they seek services or police protection.

Because of this challenge, the national approach to working with these youth is to convene a team of professionals including mental health providers, physicians and nurses, victim advocates, school staff and natural supports such as family members to create a safety plan that will reduce harm to the victim.

We have a 12 year old youth on our caseload who was referred due to concerns that she was being trafficked. The team was concerned because she had a traumatic event occur in her life and had not been at school, which was concerning as trafficking often occurs while the child is not in school. Her caregiver did not have a working cell phone so contacting the family was a challenge. A team meeting was convened and a plan was made to monitor her safety. The team was able to obtain a phone and phone card to bring over to the house. School personnel went to the home to assess her mental health and were able to deliver the phone and phone card to her caregiver. The team also coordinated an IEP meeting to implement more educational support that would keep her at school. We know from the team meetings that she will soon be receiving wrap around services. Had a coordinated team response not taken place, this youth could have potentially slipped through the cracks of the system.

In 2018 when my position was created, we had 12 girls identified in Cumberland County. Today I am following 48 youth just in Cumberland County who have been identified as at risk or confirmed for CSEC. We modeled our program after the SEEN program in Massachusetts, where they have funding for CSEC coordinators in every county. Currently, I am the only CSEC coordinator in the state of Maine. Many of the youth we work with cross over to different counties and jurisdictions in the state, which makes it more challenging to provide a coordinated team response.

Expanding funding for CSEC Coordinators throughout the state will allow us to deal with these cross-jurisdictional issues that cause many youth to fall out of our catchment area and will illuminate the need that undoubtedly exists in other communities throughout Maine. The CSEC Coordinator role allows some of our most committed professionals to serve and protect some of our most vulnerable Mainers from a group of truly awful and dangerous people who prey on them.

Thank you for your support of the program in Cumberland County and for your consideration as you expand this type of program throughout the State of Maine. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.