



## Department of the Secretary of State

Shenna Bellows  
Secretary of State

### JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

#### **L.D. 1943, “An Act To Expand the Address Confidentiality Program to Victims of Certain Human Trafficking Crimes”**

*Testimony in Support*

*Provided by Shenna Bellows Secretary of State*

February 22, 2022

Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, I am Secretary of State Shenna Bellows and a resident of Manchester. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of L.D. 1943, “An Act To Expand the Address Confidentiality Program to Victims of Certain Human Trafficking Crimes.”

The Address Confidentiality Program (ACP), administered by the Secretary of State, provides an important service to residents of the State of Maine who are survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. The program has two basic parts. First, the ACP provides a designated address to victims who have moved to a new location unknown to their abuser. Secondly, the program provides participants with a free first-class confidential mail forwarding service.

ACP allows both state and local agencies and the courts to contribute to the safety of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking survivors. If this bill passes, those who have experienced human trafficking and minor victims of kidnapping will be covered under law. This will deny abusers the opportunity to use public records as a means to locate them.

In 2021, Sexual Assault Support Centers and the Maine Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers served 172 survivors who had experienced trafficking or sexual exploitation in Maine. During that same year, our office helped 250 individuals through the ACP remain safe from their abusers. For our office, managing the ACP includes ensuring all mail for all participants is properly processed daily, taking phone calls from participants, training application assistants, managing certifications and troubleshooting any additional issues that may arise – which usually do. We do this all within existing resources. There has never been a dedicated source of funding for the ACP program staffing and associated mail costs. Our ACP coordinator manages this in addition to her duties as the coordinator for all student programs at the Department of Secretary of State and as the administrative support person for Maine’s Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Should this bill pass, and the program be expanded, additional resources, such as a dedicated staff person, may be needed in order to maintain the same level of attentiveness and prompt processing.

Further, in order to properly assist these new additions to the ACP, we would need further clarification on whether there may be adjacent individuals who would also need to be enrolled. For example, for minor victims of trafficking, we would need guidance on whether a parent or legal guardian would also be anticipated to be a participant in ACP. We are more than willing to work with the sponsor and other stakeholders to ascertain best practices.

I am proud of the work my office does to provide peace of mind to individuals who have survived traumatic situations and I hope the committee gives this bill an “ought to pass report”, so we can be of assistance to even more Mainers.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional information to the committee ahead of the work session. Thank you for your time.