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Testimony of Rep. Lori K. Gramlich presenting
**LD 589, An Act to Provide Access to Justice for Victims of
Child Sexual Abuse**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Harnett and esteemed colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Lori Gramlich, and I represent House District 13, which is the community of Old Orchard Beach. I am here to present **LD 589, An Act to Provide Access to Justice for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse**.

Child sexual abuse is a significant but preventable adverse childhood experience and public health problem. Although estimates vary across studies, the data shows:

- About 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 13 boys experience child sexual abuse at some point in childhood.
- 91% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the child or child's family knows.
- The total lifetime economic burden of child sexual abuse in the United States in 2015 was estimated to be at least \$9.3 billion. However, this is likely an underestimate of the true impact of the problem since child sexual abuse is underreported.

Experiencing child sexual abuse is an adverse childhood experience that can affect how a person thinks, acts and feels over a lifetime, resulting in short- and long-term physical and mental/emotional health consequences.

Many children wait to report or never report child sexual abuse, even into adulthood. The reasons folks do not disclose vary; however, many survivors of sexual abuse often feel shame, fear, uncertainty, guilt and often avoid reliving the pain and emotional trauma that these events evoke.

Even though sexual assault is NEVER the fault of the victim, often those who experience it feel as if something is wrong with them for having experienced it. Fear of not being believed, fear of retribution, fear of how others will react to you and treat you, and fear of being judged are all

variables into why some will never disclose. Victims may blame themselves, which leads to feelings of guilt. And like shame, when someone believes they are guilty of something, it is difficult to tell others about it. It is not uncommon for people who have experienced sexual assault to want to forget it happened and TRY to “move on.”

Consequently, many adults have yet to tell anyone that they were sexually abused as a child—not their partners, not their friends, not their family members, not even their therapists.

Developmentally, children do not have the emotional and cognitive skills to process such traumatic adverse childhood experiences. Cognitive skills, including thinking, learning, understanding, problem-solving, reasoning and remembering, in addition to the aforementioned feelings of guilt and shame, will often prevent a child from disclosing. Even well into adulthood, these feelings will often prevent us from disclosing this.

I cannot, nor would I presume to, speak for every survivor. I can only speak for myself. It has taken me many years as an adult to process the atrocities that my siblings and I endured growing up. I knew that I could never change what happened to me, but I also knew that when I got to be a grown up, I would do my best to make things better for others – to hopefully prevent children from having to endure abuse. As a social worker, I have been working my entire professional life to affect systemic change and, in this case, do my part to give voice to survivors.

LD 589 is about justice. Now I know this bill is crafted to include language about tort claims and civil procedures. I will leave the details of those components of this bill to the committee, but let me be clear: The intent of my bill is to eliminate the statute of limitations for childhood sexual abuse survivors. Period. For all of the reasons described – developmentally for children and emotionally and cognitively for adult survivors – the time frame in which survivors feel empowered to speak is variable.

When we talk about disclosure, it is about being heard. It is about being believed. And it is about justice. And for many, it is about our journey through recovery.

I know you will be hearing from folks who think eliminating the statute of limitations for survivors is a financial burden – that it will cost too much money if one enters into a suit against their perpetrator. For me, this bill is not about suing someone – again, it is about justice. Let me ask you to look at this bill through the eyes of a child, through the eyes of all the adult survivors who may finally be ready to disclose. Examine the implications and cost this has on our society.

I'd be happy to try to answer any questions for you and sincerely appreciate this opportunity to begin a dialogue and find resolution for adult survivors.

Thank you.