Testimony by Rebecca Swanson Conrad to the Maine Legislature's Government Oversight Committee
November 18, 2026

Good morning Chairs Senator Hickman and Representative Mastraccio, and members of the Oversight Committee. My name is Rebecca Swanson Conrad and I live in Auburn. I was the Chair of the Maine Community Foundation's Broad Recovery Efforts and Organizations Fund. Also, My nephew Tommy Conrad, the evening manager of Just-In-Time Recreation was murdered on October 25, 2023.

Starting that night, I saw neighbors, government, businesses and nonprofits begin caring for each other in a time of crisis, fear, and overwhelming grief. The magnitude of the event for the victim's families, the survivors, and those who were present at the murders moved the community to immediate action.

But the larger community was also stunned and needed support. And people wanted to help in any way possible. Many were moved to donate money.

There were several funds established and most supported victim's families and survivors. The Maine Community Foundation voluntarily administered two funds: The Victims and Families Fund and the Broad Recovery Efforts and Organizations Fund. The Chamber of Commerce led an economic recovery fund for local businesses. Lewiston's delegation has now leveraged federal and State funds to create Maine's Mass Violence Care Fund for ongoing medical costs after a victim exhausts their benefit from the Maine Victim's Compensation Fund.

I served as chair of the Broad Recovery Efforts and Organizations Fund based upon my role as chair of the Maine Community Foundation's Androscoggin County Fund. Maine-CF staff called me in late December 2023 to tell me about the committee and that the Androscoggin County Fund members would be invited to serve on it along with other community members.

Specific to broad community needs following the mass shooting, I had first-hand knowledge of both the families of victims and survivors as well as members of the community needing support. Never did I believe this was an either or proposition of victim's families and survivors or broad community support.

I watched broad community support begin immediately as Lewiston's healthcare organizations provided direct response and local nonprofit agencies fed children who could not get their school meals; translated public safety information into multiple local languages; added counseling shifts to ensure re-experiencing trauma did not cause more aggressive actions, including domestic violence; implemented community-wide programs

for kids to not feel helpless; provided gathering spaces for grieving; and created tributes to victims and first responders.

Funds for these additional efforts were expended immediately from the nonprofit's existing resources by putting their mission into action for the broader community with no knowledge of or expectation for reimbursement.

There is research on community reaction to mass shootings. The journal Health Affairs finds, "Mass shootings have significant detrimental effects on the health of the people who witness them, and those who live in the communities surrounding them."

The ever-increasing number of mass shootings in America should infuriate us. And that Lewiston is among the data is heartbreaking. But that our community responded with collective capacity, rooted in our deep relationships did not surprise me. I have seen this commitment in other communities following tragedies.

I was on the first flight out of the Portland Jetport following 9/11 to be with my niece who worked in the World Trade Center and was on a low enough floor to finally get out to physical safety. What struck me on the subway into the City were the signs for help: help search, feed, transport, give blood, identify, interpret, stand vigil. HELP. And every flyer, poster and leaflet was by a local New York nonprofit organization.

And around the recent Lewiston anniversary, there were interviews with community members still traumatized by the shooting. Nonprofits were noted as doing the work on the journey of healing in the aftermath of such a profound tragedy.

I do not conflate the ongoing needs of victim's families and survivors with broad community recovery. But we are here because some argue it is an either or proposition. By chairing the committee, I supported Maine-CF's decision to have a fund for nonprofits because I believe resilience is also necessary for a community to recover, and preparedness is wise for future disasters. And I know that the community expects the local nonprofit sector to continue to respond and prepare every day.

Thank you for your interest in understanding the process.

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