

Testimony of Rebekah Paredes, Executive Director, New Hope Midcoast
In Support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crime
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
January 23, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Rebekah Paredes, and I am writing on behalf of New Hope Midcoast in support of LD 2084 and the need for funding to maintain essential victim services in Maine.

New Hope Midcoast is the Regional Domestic Violence Resource Center covering Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox and Waldo Counties. We rely on federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding to cover critical victim services such as our 24/7 helpline, individual advocacy and support and our Legal Advocacy Team. The upcoming, drastic VOCA cuts would be catastrophic to our agency and our community. They represent 12% of our annual budget or \$215,000.

Our Legal Advocates are in person at all four courthouses each week for protection from abuse hearings, to help survivors navigate this often foreign and overwhelming process as they seek safety from abuse. The Legal Advocates at New Hope Midcoast have built a collaborative relationship with staff at the District Courts in our region and receive copies of temporary protection orders from the four courthouses that we cover (West Bath, Wiscasset, Rockland, and Belfast). As a result, trained advocates are able to make contact with each survivor/plaintiff to not only offer information and support, but also to help them prepare for their court appearance and attempt to connect them with legal representation, whether that be through Pine Tree Legal Services or through private attorneys we have built relationships with who are willing to offer their services pro bono or at reduced cost. Unfortunately, most plaintiffs in protection from abuse cases in our district will not have the benefit of legal representation. In these cases, without the support of Legal Advocates from New Hope Midcoast, they would very likely appear in court unprepared, not knowing what to expect, and with no source of emotional support. Fewer survivors would achieve the outcome they need – a final protection order that appropriately addresses their safety concerns.

Recently, one of the district court judges in our catchment area called one of our Legal Advocates up to the bench to thank her for providing advocacy each week and especially for assisting parties in working out agreed-upon no-contact orders. The judge said that the courts are fortunate to have advocates present and that lives are being saved by avoiding hearings and the high conflict that can come along with them. We experience the truth of this statement with case after case that we support in our four courts each week.

The loss of this critical funding would mean that we would be unable to offer these services. It would be catastrophic to the victims and families we serve, to our organization and to our community. Please support funding LD2084 and help us maintain funding for these lifesaving services.

Respectfully, Rebekah Paredes, Executive Director, New Hope Midcoast