

Testimony in Support of LD 2085 - An Act to Update Maine's Domestic Violence and Stalking Laws

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

I am Shannon Saxby, a Licensed Social Worker, a mother, and a resident of Windham, Maine. I am writing to express my wholehearted support for LD 2085, An Act to Update Maine's Domestic Violence and Stalking Laws. I want to share my personal story to emphasize the critical need for legislation addressing cyberstalking.

On average, nearly twenty people in the United States are abused by an intimate partner every minute of the day (National Statistics, n.d.). Recently, the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence reported that almost fifty percent of all homicides in Maine between 2020 and 2022 resulted from domestic abuse, including four children. For the past ten months, I have been the victim of stalking by a former partner. As someone who has experienced these horrors, I understand all too well that stalking and domestic violence often go hand in hand. I represent the one in four and the one in three women who will face these experiences in their lifetime.

In April 2023, the District Court granted me a Protection from Harassment (PFH) order against my former partner, an IT Specialist and Cyber Security professional. Despite expressing concerns about his mental state, substance use, extensive military training, and access to firearms, only a PFH was granted, with no mention of his guns being revoked. Subsequently, cyberstalking, telephone and online harassment, and theft began immediately. I have diligently reported these violations and the ensuing fear they have instilled in me and my children to the Windham Police. The role of being a victim of domestic abuse and stalking is exhausting. Oftentimes, the onus is put on the victim to change their behaviors, routines, and limit their virtual presence. I have had to change my telephone number because of the endless harassment I have experienced. Unfortunately, our current laws do not adequately address our society's advancements in technology even though 80% of stalking victims report being stalked through technology (Morgan, n.d.). Stalking, especially in the digital realm, is challenging to prove, and the burden of proof falls onto the victim, even with a legal protection order in place, such as in my case. This repeated harassment has inflicted significant fear and anxiety on myself and my daughters, with my younger child now under the care of a child psychiatrist for anxiety.

Throughout the last ten months, my former partner has utilized his expertise in IT to his advantage to continue to stalk me and cause me harm. He has hacked into my personal bank accounts and stolen money from me, cyberstalked me, including unauthorized access to social media accounts (including professional accounts), 'spoofing' my telephone number to call others on my behalf, harassment of my co-workers, neighbors, friends, and family, as well as attempts to cancel online utility accounts. Regrettably, the response from the Windham Police has been inadequate, marked by delays, misinformation, and minimal follow-up on issued arrest warrant(s). To this day, the theft charges I filed in April 2023 have still not been executed.

The lack of clear means for law enforcement and our judicial system to prosecute matters of digital abuse/stalking such as what I've described, only retraumatizes and causes further harm to victims. Victims are very much being terrorized by these actions and are often living in fear and embarrassment of what their abuser will do next. As someone who considers themselves privileged in terms of means, resources, support, knowledge, and willingness to speak up, I am deeply concerned for others who are

experiencing these actions and traumas and who have less than I do and who may be too fearful to use their voice to create change. All of us are all too familiar with local news stories and headlines of murder/suicides across the state of Maine, and as you may know, it was revealed after the horrific mass shooting in Lewiston that Robert Card's motivations were associated with locating an ex-girlfriend. What may come off as benign to someone who is not properly educated and trained in the cycles of abuse, are very much the foundations of what can escalate to, historically women, ending up dead by the hands of men. The gaps in the legal framework and law enforcement response are glaring, and I implore you to consider the urgency of passing this legislation that comprehensively addresses cyberstalking and makes our laws stronger for all victims of abuse. The safety and well-being of countless individuals, including myself and my children, are at stake.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to any steps you can take to address the systemic issues surrounding domestic violence and stalking within our community.

Thank you for your time, and please feel free to reach out to me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Shannon Saxby, LMSW Windham, Maine