

Testimony of Susan Giambalvo

In Support of LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027

Before the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services

2/13/2025

Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen, Representatives Gattine and Meyers, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services, my name is Susan Giambalvo, and I am writing on behalf of Caring Unlimited, York County's Domestic Violence Resource Center, to ask you to increase funding for domestic violence resource centers in the biennial budget.

Maine's network of Domestic Violence Resource Centers provides 24/7 critical, wrap-around services for survivors of domestic abuse and their children and essential support, training, and information for community response systems. Together, we serve 12,000 people experiencing domestic abuse and violence every year statewide.

The state has not invested enough to support lifesaving services or fulfill the state's commitment to victims of domestic violence. It is not only that we can't expand to meet the emergency needs in our community, we cannot even sustain current levels of service, and have been cutting back services in response to flat funding and increased costs for many years.

At Caring Unlimited, the share of services supported by the state general funds through the DHHS contract was 13% in FY24, with the total DHHS contract - federal and state funds combined - constituting 38% of our revenue. In the current fiscal year, which is an outlier due to the temporary general funds replacing the loss in federal VOCA dollars, the DHHS contract is 35% of our total revenue, and state general funds comprise 20% of our total agency budget. [for historical perspective: in FY19, the DHHS contract constituted 53% of our total agency revenues, with the state general funds themselves constituting only 6% of our budget overall.]

All of our costs continue to rise—wages alone have increased 30% statewide. We put significant resources into raising other private or competitive grant funds; but in the end, the dollars we raise subsidize our core, state contracted services instead of expanding them to meet the need. We have already made hard choices about what we can offer and who can receive it because we have cut staffing, reduced levels of assistance, and curtailed programs.

- Caring Unlimited no longer offers in person support groups or standing office hours at satellite locations throughout the county. We do not have staff capacity or travel funds to support it.

- We eliminated our Parent Support program. This program offered parenting education and support groups, connected kids to special services, and planned recreational activities to promote healthy family bonding and reduce the impact of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences on children exposed to domestic violence.
- We stopped providing court accompaniment except in the most high-risk situations, leaving victims without a key source of support, maybe their only source of support, at an emotionally difficult and traumatic time.

At the same time, the needs of the people we serve are increasing in complexity, degree, and risk level. 58% of the victims we served last year used two or more CU programs. Statewide, calls to the helpline have increased and the number of volunteers helping to answer has decreased.

Our system partners are also under strain and rely on us to be there to help in ways they cannot. We support every Protection from Abuse court docket, increasing the courts efficacy and efficiency, for almost 700 cases a year. We receive direct referrals from Child Protective Services to help victims of DV and their children find safety from abuse. And law enforcement send us the police reports for every domestic violence crime in York County so we can step in, call every victim, and ensure they have the information and access to resources they need to support their safety in the aftermath of an immediate crisis.

What will a failure to keep pace with the cost of providing services mean to York County?

We will see more deaths. Half of all homicides in Maine are domestic abuse homicides<sup>1</sup>. In 27 cases reviewed in the most recent homicide review panel report, only one victim of intimate partner homicide was working with a community-based advocacy organization, and only one victim had a protection from abuse order<sup>2</sup>. Our services are homicide prevention.

Without increased investment in domestic violence services, more victims will not get a service they need at the time they need it most. Maybe, they won't even know that help is available.

- We will not have the capacity to engage with survivors beyond the immediate crisis or address the broader safety needs of adult survivors and their children.
- We will not be able to make advocate-initiated calls to victims named in police reports leaving them with no information or connection to resources, support, and safety planning.
- We will not be able to help meet the longer-term needs for economic self-sufficiency that help people stay free from abuse once they have risked everything to leave.
- We will not be in classrooms to help youth learn healthy relationships behaviors and prevent future harm from abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> [14th DAHRP Report Final word 1.23.24 - accessible.pdf](#) (pg 7)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. (pg 15)

- We will not be able to help every Protection from Abuse plaintiff who wants our support and assistance, leaving many to face their abuser alone and navigate an intimidating court system in the wake of trauma.

Maine can do better for victims of domestic violence. With 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men experiencing serious physical violence from an intimate partner<sup>3</sup> and more than one third of DV survivors becoming homeless immediately after separating from their abusive partner<sup>4</sup>, we can't afford not to.

Please ensure that critical domestic violence services remain available, effective, confidential, and free. Make it clear that domestic violence has no home in our state and take action to increase ongoing funding for domestic violence services in Maine's biennial budget.

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<sup>3</sup> [Domestic Violence Statistics - The Hotline](#)

<sup>4</sup> [NRCDV-Stats-DVHomelessness](#)