

Suzanne Barton
Finding Our Voices, Camden ME
LD 670

March 3, 2025

Dear Sponsors of LD 670: I want to thank you all.

Thank you Rep. Eaton, Senator Ross, Rep. Cloutier, Rep. Copeland, Rep. Graham, Senator Grohoski et al. Thank you.

Thank you for recognizing the dangers of coercive control. My testimony--to help you understand the atrocities of coercive control--would take over an hour. However, for the purposes of this legislative session, I will keep this very brief.

My name is Suzanne Barton, and I use to live in York County. My children attended Thornton Academy in Saco, ME.

I humbly and wholeheartedly support LD 670. I ask that you all pursue this bill until it becomes law.

Why?

I have witnessed first-hand the devastation caused from prolonged, coercive control (2006 to present time).

As a mother, it witnessed the long-term trauma caused; not just for me, but worse---the children.

Please add verbiage that minor children be protected from coercive control as well.

Our divorce was in 2006, but back and forth court petitions continued until 2014. Coercion, financial abuse and maltreatment of minors is a high percentage of post-divorce "Power and Control."

As a tax payer, advocate and activist, I have seen the ripple effects to which coercive control adversely affects learning and academics in children; changes in my own brain and ability to process and learn new information / same with minor children; the cost in lost work, medical care, lost time in the classroom, and the additional resources in the form of law enforcement as well as behavior health hospital admissions.

DV, IPV, and coercive control are public safety issues that costs taxpayers millions when left unaddressed, and / or re-framed as "high conflict divorce," or "maternal parental alienation."

In my professional life, I see the devastating effects of childhood trauma. For the last 5 years, I have worked in Behavioral Health helping adults heal from childhood traumas. Their nervous systems have been re-wired to live in a state of survival.

These adults now require services due to childhoods riddled with violence (coercive control, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, psychological abuse, and physical abuse). Do not underestimate the power of the verbal / spoken and psychological abuses. Research has proven that the brain of the victim is changed as a result.

I testify that living through this type of abuse---to this day 20 years post-divorce---is life changing. I just want my life back. I want healing for my children, and I want healing for the hundreds and thousands of children adversely affected by coercive control.

We will never be the same people. We will never completely heal. We are left to learn to manage and that's it. There are no words for this. The medical professionals, teachers, etc.. are not aware of the signs and symptoms. It goes misunderstood and mislabeled as ADD, or ADHD, or oppositional etc.

We are slowly recovering but the pain and the trauma is there every day we rise up and get out of bed.

As a healthcare professional, I testify that it is worth preventing such abuses and pursuing trauma informed care / interventions / wrap around services that understand

coercive control.

As Frederick Douglas once stated, "It is easier to raise a child well, than to repair a broken man," (paraphrase).

Thank you for your time and attention.

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