

Testimony of W. Zach Griffith, Safe Voices CDVIP Program Coordinator
Speaking in Support of LD 666: "An Act to Prevent Domestic Violence by Providing
Adequate Funding Support for Court-Ordered Certified Domestic Violence Intervention
Programs."

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Date of Public Hearing: March 3, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the
Committee,

Greetings to all of you. My name is Zach Griffith, and I run the Men's Certified Domestic
Violence Intervention Program for Safe Voices, covering Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford
Counties. I also work as a contract facilitator for Through These Doors, the DVRC responsible
for Cumberland County, so I have experience working directly with hundreds of CDVIP
participants from 4 different counties in our State.

Given my experiences talking to folks outside our organization about my work, it is safe to
assume that at least some, if not all, of you have a certain image of the kinds of men that
attend these classes. It's probably the same stereotypical image that everyone I talk to has
as well. In fact, as I was starting this work, I had similar expectations of the population I'd be
working with: ~~guys in stained A-Frame undershirts (colloquially known as "wife beaters"),~~
~~those~~ who are poor, illiterate, bad fathers, uneducated, ~~generally stupid~~, abusing drugs
and/or alcohol; men who approach most aspects of life with violence.

That image was immediately gone after my very first experience facilitating.

The men I've worked with come from every socioeconomic circumstance, have a wide range
of education and employment ranging from manual laborers to teachers, from college
professors to cops, pharmacists to lawyers, local activists and politicians. Some men walk
miles to class in Carhartt jackets and ratty work boots and sit down next to others who
arrived in \$100,000 cars wearing \$1000 suits. Trying to describe the "average abuser" is like
trying to describe the average American. The pool of our participants are ~~near~~nearly as
varied as the spectrum and kaleidoscope of humanity that makes up the citizenry of our
country. Those who choose to use violence, power and control over their partners come
from every racial demographic, socioeconomic status, religious belief, etc. etc.

This stereotype is problematic in many ways, but I'd like to address two. First, these
stereotypes allow both societies at large, and we as individuals, to ignore abusive behaviors
in others and even ourselves when the stereotype doesn't fit. Since there is a fundamental
misunderstanding of what constitutes abuse (it's more than just physical and sexual
violence), and who is committing that violence, we tend to collectively dismiss victims if
their abuser doesn't fit into our stereotypical view of who an abuser is supposed to be.

Secondly, when an abuser does fall into that stereotype, it's easier to justify simply sending them to jail, to punish rather than attempt rehabilitation. Why would anyone want to invest money in a group of people who we see as by ~~and in~~ large leeches in society? It allows the collective "we" to assure ourselves that only "they" are the problem, and not ourselves or the ones we call friend or family.

I believe in this program and ~~its~~ approach with all my heart. That's why I do this work. That's why all of us in this line of work do it. My priority is always, and will always be, the safety of women in these men's lives now and in perpetuity. However, I also believe that the men who take these opportunities to examine and change their belief systems and behaviors ~~that their lives~~ will ultimately ~~lead get~~ better ~~lives~~ as well. These unhealthy beliefs about manhood, masculinity, and violence, are exhausting to carry around all of the time. I see my work as not only helping rehabilitate an individual, but as creating agents of change. The men who complete this course and truly take what they've learned and discussed to heart, ~~they~~ have the potential to be some of our greatest allies in pushing change on a systemic level. Some of the most prolific anti-hate advocates were once part of the ~~hate groups~~ ~~very societies~~ they now work to eradicate.

The stereotypical abuser is a monster. It's easy to cast monsters into dungeons and forget about them. A vast majority of the men who make their way through our program are not monsters. They are misguided, miseducated, and misled by the cultural milieu being broadcast to men. Prison does not rehabilitate; it only prolongs and ~~too often (more often than not)~~ reinforces the belief systems these men have used to justify their own violence. Prison alone does not allow these men a chance to change. Certified Domestic Violence Intervention Programs are investments in creating a better, safer, state for victims and survivors of domestic violence. Supporting this bill ~~willis~~ helping build the foundation for a better future for not only victims and survivors, but for all Mainers.

Thank you for your time and consideration, ~~all, and all~~ the work you do on behalf of your constituents.

Sincerely,
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