

Testimony of Tamar Perfit Mathieu

Written Testimony in Support of LD 666: "An Act to An Act to Prevent Domestic Violence by Providing Adequate Funding Support to Court-Ordered Certified Domestic Violence Intervention Programs."

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Date of Public Hearing:

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

My name is Tamar Perfit Mathieu. I am the Department Director of Family Enrichment Services at Penquis in Bangor. I have a long personal history of working with survivors of domestic violence starting in 1997, as an AmeriCorps attorney at Pine Tree Legal Assistance, and then, in 1998, as an attorney in what was the Penquis Law Project, providing victims of violence with civil legal assistance in their family law matters.

Penquis, a community action agency, began providing certified DVIP services for men who use violence in their heterosexual relationships in Penobscot and Piscataquis counties in 2019. We began providing Domestic Violence Intervention programming in Knox and Waldo counties in October of 2022, when the existing provider had to close their program, and we stepped in to provide temporary support in York County from October 2023, when that provider also closed, until late September 2024, when our capacity to provide that support ended. DVIP is a critical element of violence prevention and a coordinated community response to domestic violence. Only if we create systemic change, hold perpetrators accountable, and change the behavior of perpetrators can we keep victims, their children, and our communities safer. We see firsthand how these programs make a difference.

Penquis and Partners for Peace, the domestic violence resource center serving Penobscot and Piscataquis counties, have a long history of collaboration. We work closely together on many projects, importantly including DVIP. Together, we support the whole family. We provide programming that supports the opportunity for belief and behavior change, and Partners for Peace supports the needs of the person who has been harmed.

Despite our strong belief in the value of DVIP, and its importance to public safety in our communities, we have struggled to sustain this community-based intervention. We are concerned about what the future of the program in our counties might look like. We have had to rely on participant fees to support classes and, while the reduced rate program administered by the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence has been hugely helpful and has allowed participants to pay according to their income, a lack of steady funding has resulted in program uncertainty. It has also resulted in a lack of an ability to adequately pay,

recruit, and retain staff, which has resulted in staff vacancies and turnover. DVIP must be delivered according to best practices and the rules for certification promulgated by the Department of Corrections in order to assure quality and safety. Lack of consistent and stable funding puts in question the ability of programs to deliver the highest quality services that victims deserve.

DVIP is a key component of a coordinated community response to violence. Yet programs across the state are struggling to maintain these services. An investment in DVIP now is needed to save these programs in our communities. In doing so, it will save future costs related to increased crime, increased victimization, and higher rates of incarceration.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with you on this important issue.

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