

Testimony of Angie Alfonso

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, my name is Angie Alfonso. I am the Director of Advocacy and Outreach Services at Partners for Peace, the Domestic Violence Resource Center serving Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties. I have a long history of working with survivors of abuse and violence since 1998. I am also a designated monitor for the Penquis Certified Domestic Violence Intervention Program (CDVIP).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 666. This bill will ensure funding is available to provide the highest quality violence intervention programs statewide as mandated by statute. This bill demonstrates our state's commitment to reducing recidivism and preventing domestic violence homicide. These efforts are designed to reduce risks and enhance safety for victims, and their children, by requiring people who cause harm to examine their behaviors and beliefs through a process of change.

Partners for Peace and Penquis, our local community action agency that provides CDVIP services for men, have a long history of collaboration. While Penquis works directly with people who have caused harm, Partners for Peace works with survivors who have been impacted by that harm to increase safety and obtain justice.

Timely and effective communication between the two programs has been critical in reducing further abuse and violence. CDVIP educators communicate partner contact information with Partners for Peace so advocates can initiate contact with survivors, some of whom may not be aware that services and support exist for them. CDVIP educators consult regularly on cases where safety concerns have been identified because of a participant's comments or behaviors. CDVIP staff also provide information about changes to a participant's status in the group such as schedule changes, discharge from the program, and successful completion. This information is critical for advocates and survivors to inform their plan for safety. Survivors rely on systems that work effectively and efficiently to ensure their safety and the safety of their families. **The collaborative partnership between a Certified Domestic Violence Intervention Program and a Domestic Violence Resource Center is part of the coordinated community response in increasing safety, reducing recidivism, and saving lives.**

Over the last two years, our local CDVIP has had turnover in key staff which caused us to worry about the long-term feasibility and availability of local intervention programming. In Maine's rural communities, the closure of any community resource is particularly devastating to getting people connected to the services they need. We are thankful that it appears the program will continue, at least for now, but this experience makes it all the more real to our region that the sustainability of this critical service needs to be better attended to.

Survivors should not be solely responsible for holding those who cause them harm to account. Survivors rely on systems, such as the criminal justice system, to intervene and to apply meaningful restitution and sentencing for the harm they have caused. CDVIP is an integral part of that system, an evidence-based, effective accountability tool that supports change and increased safety.

Some survivors have shared that they feel safer when the person who has caused them harm is participating in the CDVIP, giving them space to breathe. Other survivors have observed positive changes in behaviors, like engaging in more respectful communication. They have shared that when the person is in the program, they know they have 90 minutes each week that they don't need to be worried or looking over their shoulder. Some have shared that since the person has been in the program, they haven't heard from them, so it seems to be working. Survivors have also shared that co-parenting has become easier, crediting the program. Some survivors also recognize that the CDVIP is not a magic wand because the desire to change beliefs and behaviors rests with the person who caused harm. Survivors want the abuse and violence to stop. **The CDVIPs in Maine play a pivotal role in creating safety for victims and creating space for people who cause harm to examine their beliefs and commit to change.**

CDVIPs are a critical part of the coordinated community response to abuse and violence, and collaboration between programs increases individual and public safety. Survivors are counting on us to create spaces where change can occur. Changes that save lives, their lives.

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

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