

Testimony of Jonathan D Heath

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,

I have co-facilitated men's CDVIP classes for 18 years with Family Violence Project's ChangeWork CDVIP, (formerly MensWork), and during that time, I had the opportunity to share lessons with my own father, from the same Duluth curriculum that we use each week and in the very same way we do in CDVIP class. In CDVIP classes, co-facilitators meet each participant with respect, and we honor the likelihood that despite what they have done, that they may have children who love them, who are depending on us to facilitate a process where their dad will take accountability and begin to repair the harm. The process is transformative for those who are willing to take accountability and commit to changing. I would like to share my story beginning with a poem I wrote in my twenties about my own experience, based upon my favorite childhood book, The Night Before Christmas by Clement Clarke Moore.

Broken hearts, a battered mom, always in a fight, dad's the center of our world, judging, always right.
Man-made clouds predicted, abusive lightning storms, screaming, slamming, strangling, damning,
always causing fright.

My brain was full of worry, my heart was full of dread, it left no room for learning and little room for friends. Christmas seemed a trigger, it always brought the same, slamming doors, and screeching tires, dad was gone again. Our hearts and house were empty, I think my mom was scared, her furrowed brow and worried eyes betrayed her calming words.

I look back now and see myself, nestled snug in bed, but there wer-en't any sugarplums dancing in my head. Instead, I said a prayer to God while falling off to sleep, that he might bring my father home, if only I believed.

Then in the darkness of night, there arose such a clatter, I froze in my bed to hear what was the matter. There were loud words and hitting, slaps rang like a bell, my mom started crying, and then it was still. It was then that I realized my prayer had been answered, and I slept with the guilt of my mom being battered.

The only real respite from the violence he wrought, was each week on the Sabbath, and church was the spot. A preacher man he, with eloquent ease, delivered the message and people believed.

I'd sit in his arms as the pews emptied out, and with certainty thought that it must be my fault. So, I prayed that me and my mom would obey, to not anger this dad, cause I wished he would stay.

My story has turned into one of healing and forgiveness. At 68 years old, my father took accountability for the domestic abuse represented in this poem, and for the next 23 years until his death at almost 92, he successfully repaired the harm he had caused. His accountability freed me to lay down the hurtful and

heavy memories I was carrying, like evidence for a trial that never came. I cannot stress the healing power of accountability on the life of a survivor. It freed me to remember countless good memories with my dad, and he became a real dad, and a trusted friend. His accountability and change made it so his granddaughter, (my daughter) at 22 years old, could write the following words about the very same man, just two weeks before he passed at almost 92.

Opa's Hands

His fingertips have always been rough, touched by endless years of labor, fixing, working, farming, more things than I could ever imagine.

His wedding ring, a constant, which he cut and welded to make bigger, as his arthritic hands changed, because nothing could stop him from wearing that ring that symbolized the 68-year marriage to the love and light of his life.

His hands have always been warm, and he squeezes you as you have a conversation, so you know that he's listening, a trait that I saw him use to comfort countless people's hearts throughout my life.

He nods and half smiles and you always know he's really thinking about the words you are saying and then he pauses to think of a meaningful response.

His jokes have always made me laugh more than anyone else. He tells new stories every time you're with him but also repeats the ones that are most important to him over and over, something that would annoy some, but I was grateful that these stories would be ingrained into my memories forever.

I sat in his big chair in the living room after school almost every day for my entire childhood, and we always had the best chats. He loves to show you his projects and share with you the things that make him happy. He is someone I have genuinely enjoyed hanging out with for the entirety of my life.

He will always be the person I want to make proud, and I'll continue to love his soul long after he is gone. He told me countless times that he is proud of the person that I am. Those words I'll hold with me forever.
-With love,

His granddaughter

Please note the contrast between these two poems. Who my dad was to my daughter, to my mom, to me and to my siblings during the last 23 years of his life, made it so he got to receive this incredible validation of his impact as a grandfather. It is a testament to a father's ability to change and repair the harm of his coercive controlling domestic abuse. It is because of him that I approach every CDVIP class with the truth of knowing that change is possible, and that a father's accountability can bring immeasurable healing to a family.

As a lifelong Mainer, I implore you on behalf of everyday Mainers, who like me are childhood survivors of Domestic Violence, to please support CDVIP and give Maine childhood survivors an opportunity to remember the good times. Your support will not only change their future for the better, it will leave a legacy for generations.

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