

Livka Farrell
Rockland
LD 875

I am writing in strong support of LD 875, because fully funding domestic violence services is vital to the health and safety of Maine people. Mainers are beginning to see what has long been invisible, that the number of people experiencing domestic abuse is rising rapidly. As more and more of our neighbors need support, there is a real lack of understanding and empathy, as well as access to critical resources.

My experience volunteering (and later working) as an advocate on a Domestic Violence Resource Center hotline has been heartbreaking. I speak with survivors who are experiencing homelessness, unemployment, trauma, fears for their children, and uncertainty about their futures as the direct result of abuse. Often victims don't need advice, they just need someone to be present with them as they process what their gut is already telling them, and someone to help connect them with assistance.

Our society doesn't do a very good job of recognizing the experiences of survivors in conversations about domestic abuse. I'm glad to help survivors feel heard after not being believed and being actively silenced. Family, friends, and neighbors often find it easier to blame victims than to accept that there's an individual in their community behaving badly. So many people in the survivors' towns know about the abuse and do nothing, refuse to believe the abuse happened, minimize the abuse, shame the victim for speaking about abuse, tell the victims they are "handling it" wrong, actively enable the abuser's rights and access to the survivors, and disrespect survivors' feelings about the abuse. Advocates on 24/7 helplines may be the first (and only!) person who offers an empathetic, nonjudgmental ear and access to support services.

Maine Domestic Violence Resource Centers offer many resources, including (but not limited to!) 24/7 hotlines, shelter beds, support groups, long-term housing assistance, advocates to accompany survivors to court, help filing out protection from abuse orders, clothing and toiletries, and gas cards. Without these vital services, survivors—including many, many children—are likely to experience deprivation, poverty, and isolation.

If we want survivors to have the support they so desperately need, we have to fund it! Thank you—from the bottom of my heart—for your support of LD 875.

I would like to close with a quote from President Jimmy Carter: "I have learned that our greatest blessings come when we are able to improve the lives of others..."