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Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier in support of

LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Kristen Cloutier, and I represent House District 94, which includes part of my hometown of Lewiston. I am submitting this testimony in support of **LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence**.

Domestic violence can affect everyone of every age, of every gender and every circumstance. It knows no boundaries and leaves lasting trauma in its wake.

This year, the recent tragic murders in Bath and Bangor underscore the urgency of our cause and remind us of the devastating impact that domestic violence has on our communities. The heartbreaking losses of Virginia Cookson, Lacey Tidswell, Lisa Bailey and Jennifer Bailey highlight the critical need for increased resources for domestic violence victims.

According to the state's latest report, domestic abuse homicides accounted for 49% of Maine's homicides from 2020 to 2023. These are not isolated events, but part of a broader pattern occurring across our state and nation. Domestic violence victims are more likely to be harmed by someone they know than by a stranger, emphasizing the need for community support and proactive interventions.

LD 875 appropriates \$4 million for essential services for victims of domestic violence. These services include emergency shelter and housing support, 24/7 helpline assistance, safety planning, court advocacy, prevention education and trauma-informed counseling services. This funding will strengthen the network of nine domestic violence resource centers serving all 16 counties in Maine, ensuring that help is available whenever and wherever it is needed.

Many survivors in our state continue to face barriers when seeking help. Rural communities often lack accessible resources, and cultural and language barriers can prevent immigrant and refugee populations from receiving timely assistance. This funding will help address these gaps and ensure that all Mainers, regardless of where they live or their background, have access to life-saving services.

I ask you to remember that behind every statistic is a real person—a neighbor, a colleague, a family member—whose life could benefit from this funding.

Thank you for your consideration and I urge you to vote in support of LD 875.