

Testimony of Shawn P. LaGrega
In Support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence
Wednesday, March 19th, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representatives Meyers, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Shawn LaGrega, Deputy Director, Maine Pretrial Services, Inc. and I am writing to urge you to invest in the critical lifesaving services of Maine's network of Domestic Violence Resource Centers.

Maine Pretrial Services, Inc. (MPS) is a private, nonprofit agency committed to providing pretrial services, post conviction alternatives and diversion options throughout the state of Maine. MPS has partnered with multiple Domestic Violence Resource Centers over the years to ensure supportive connections for Maine's justice involved populations who identify as victims/survivors, as they transition back to the community from incarceration.

Domestic violence is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach. Pretrial services play a vital role in assessing risk, monitoring defendants, and ensuring compliance with court-ordered conditions. However, without the insight and expertise of domestic violence advocates, critical safety concerns may be overlooked.

By working together, advocates and pretrial services staff work collaboratively to promote safety, accountability, and justice for survivors.

Advocates provide essential survivor-centered perspectives that help inform pretrial release conditions, levels and intensity of supervision and overall agency understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence. Domestic violence cases often involve coercive control, intimidation, and escalation of violence. Advocates offer crucial context that helps pretrial services assess the true risk posed by an offender, preventing dangerous individuals from being released without adequate safeguards.

When advocates and pretrial services communicate effectively, we can monitor compliance more efficiently. Advocates can relay victims' concerns about violations, while pretrial services can take swift action to enforce conditions, preventing further harm. When pretrial services integrate best practices from domestic violence advocacy, they contribute to more effective interventions. This can lead to better outcomes for both survivors and offenders, ultimately reducing reoffending and promoting community safety.

Over the years, we have worked diligently to build a coordinated approach between advocacy organizations and pretrial services. This partnership did not happen overnight; it has required ongoing training, relationship-building, and the establishment of best practices to ensure that survivor voices are heard, risks are properly assessed, and safety remains the top priority. However, without sustained funding, this progress is at risk. Funding is the foundation that allows domestic violence resource centers to maintain specialized staff, provide comprehensive training, and implement safety-driven policies that protect survivors.

We cannot afford to take steps backward. The safety of survivors depends on a justice system that is informed, responsive, and well-resourced. Continued funding is not just an investment in this partnership, it is an investment in saving lives.

I urge you to support ongoing funding to sustain and strengthen this collaboration. We have seen firsthand the impact of this work, and we must ensure it continues for the safety of our communities.