

Testimony of Melanie Plourde, LCSW
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
March 19, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint
Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Melanie Plourde representing SJV Behavioral Health Services, and I am writing to share why support for this critical funding is so important to the women, children and families within the various towns of Aroostook County. My colleagues and I have been working in the mental health field for 24 years and can confidently say that within those 24 years, we have worked closely with Hope and Justice each year and each year have seen the lifeline these services and advocates have provided for women and their children.

Their vast knowledge of domestic violence and its impact on women, children, families, and the community as a whole is irreplaceable to the county. No other agency can provide this level of wrap around care for victims and survivors of domestic violence, from their ability to provide anonymous helpline support, education of the legal supports available and the complexities of our legal system, to their quick action to provide safe housing that saves lives every day. They provide essential education and various training opportunities to help support first responders, mental health and medical providers, college staff and students, and the list goes on, in the hopes that we can as a community work towards ending violence and creating a safety net for those in need. The Hope and Justice project knows the value of education to help end the cycle of violence and provides the much needed voice to women, children, and families who have been traumatized needlessly by domestic violence.

My colleagues and I have referred countless clients to the Hope and Justice program to help navigate various complex systems such as but limited to the legal system, Department of Health and Human Services, housing, financial aid assistance and basic life skills as these women and children very often are left with the clothes on their backs and very few items of comfort. Without their support and advocacy, these women oftentimes choose to remain in a very dangerous and scary household due to feeling overwhelmed with not knowing how to access services leading to fear of being unable to live on their own, provide for their children and very often have had their trauma minimized by uneducated law enforcement, first responders, medical professions, etc. It would be a very sad and dangerous day in Aroostook County if we should lose this life-saving resource. While one can argue that the first responders along with medical and mental health providers can offer support and therapeutic interventions, we cannot replace the knowledge and safety nets that The Hope and Justice Project provide. It takes a team effort within the community to end domestic violence, the lead of this team

needs to continue to be The Hope and Justice Project.

Sincerely,

Melanie Hounds, LCSW

Melanie Plourde, LCSW on behalf of SJV Behavioral Health

Lori Martin, LCSW

Michelle Berube, LCSW

Stacie Murphy, LCSW