

**Testimony of Billie-Jo Caron**  
**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 14, 2025**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Billie-Jo Caron, I am from Aroostook County, and I am writing to share why support for this critical funding is so important.

Hope and Justice Project does not receive nearly enough funding to allow for all the different advocacy that they provide. If funding for Hope and Justice would be cut, there would be numerous amounts of mothers, children as well as family member affected by these financial cuts. And would not be able to keep their doors open to advocate for the people in need.

As a case manager that started the Pretrial Services Program in the Aroostook County 20 years ago. I found that working with Hope and Justice Project has been a really helpful resource in our community with providing the advocacy to the people in need. Hope and Justice has always been a wonderful agency to work with.

While working with Hope and Justice Project, we have been able to work together and communicate the needs of my clients and help me provide my clients with the right services. Hope and Justice has been able to provide a safe living shelter for my clients in need. If it were not for Hope and Justice providing safe shelter for my clients, their chances of survival would decrease.

Going through the Criminal courts for domestic abuse survivors can be a deeply traumatizing and daunting experience. The last 20 years I have supported scores of the survivors through the criminal courts who have totally frozen, been utterly overwhelmed or had anxiety attacks before the proceeding have even started. Hope and Justice was able to provide advocacy and support to these women, children and family members of these victims.

Most survivors would say that they are absolutely terrified of the whole court process. Hope and Justice Project advocates are essential because they understand the courts, they build up a relationship with professionals who work in the courts and are focused on supporting survivors through the court process.

Hope and Justice Project make survivors feel safe and confident, to make it not so unbearable. They guide them through the process, to keep them calm as possible, make sure they are prepared for what will happen inside the courtroom.

Hope and Justice Project Court/shelter advocates have a crucial role to play to support victims/survivors but they are often very stretched, juggling numerous survivors. There is still a long way to go when it comes to supporting domestic violence survivors through the family/criminal court system. We need more funding for project like Hope and Justice to continue with their support, advocacy and shelter of survivors. Their work and voices go unheard at times, but we need to keep funding for Hope and Justice Project, so they can continue with all the amazing work that they do in the community.