

Marissa Keiser
Limestone
LD 875

Testimony of Marissa Keiser

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 Marissa Keiser, and I serve as a School Social Worker at Limestone Community School. I am testifying today to urge your support for LD 875, which seeks to fund essential services for victims of domestic violence.

Aroostook County is the northernmost region of Maine, characterized by its rural nature and tight-knit communities. In a region where access to mental health services and resources can be limited, the Hope and Justice Project has been a critical lifeline for students and families in our area. Limestone faces its own unique set of challenges. Many of our students come from homes where financial resources are scarce, and some have experienced trauma or instability in their families. For these students, the social-emotional learning lessons provided by Hope and Justice Project are not just educational—they are transformative.

The Hope and Justice Project's commitment to supporting the well-being of our children is unwavering, and the positive effects of their work are evident. Our students eagerly look forward to the Hope and Justice days, and they often ask when the next session will be. This level of enthusiasm speaks volumes about the value our students place on these lessons, which help them build critical life skills such as emotional regulation, healthy communication, and empathy.

One powerful example of how these lessons resonate with our students occurred during a session in which each student was given a potato. The activity was simple, yet profound. Students were asked to describe what their potato looked like—some were smooth, others had bumps, bruises, and imperfections. Despite their differences, each potato was still a "good potato." This lesson, while fun, was a reflection of an important truth: people, much like potatoes, may carry scars, imperfections, or experiences that set them apart, but they are still valuable and worthy of respect. The students took so much from this activity, relating it to their own lives and how they interact with others. They recognized that everyone has their own struggles and unique qualities, and that these differences should be respected, not judged. This lesson made them reflect on their friendships, their communication, and how they treat others—whether it's a friend, a peer, or even someone they don't know well. The message was clear: just as a potato may look different on the outside, so too do people, but that doesn't diminish their worth.

In addition to the impact of Hope and Justice Project's educational programs, I have personally referred several families to their services, and I've seen firsthand the difference this support can make. One particular case stands out that I will never forget. Without the intervention of Hope and Justice Project, I truly believe the outcome could have been much worse for them. Through their services, this family received not only immediate support but also ongoing guidance and resources that helped them escape a dangerous environment. An adult and children were given the opportunity to heal and rebuild their lives in a safe, supportive environment.

These kinds of stories are not uncommon. For many families in rural areas like Limestone, Hope and Justice Project is often the first and only resource they have when it comes to escaping domestic violence. The services they provide are essential, and they give families the support and resources they need to recover and thrive.

These services are especially crucial in a time when many of our students are faced with challenges at home and in their communities. The Hope and Justice Project's programs offer not only valuable tools for coping with adversity but also a safe space for students to learn about healthy relationships, boundaries, and personal empowerment. By supporting LD 875, we are not only helping victims of domestic

violence but also empowering the next generation to break the cycle of violence and create healthier futures for themselves and their communities.

I strongly encourage you to support LD 875 to ensure that essential services like those provided by Hope and Justice Project continue to thrive and reach more children and families in need—particularly in rural and underserved areas like Aroostook County.

Together, we can make a lasting difference in the lives of those impacted by domestic violence, providing them with the tools and resources they need to heal and rebuild.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Marissa L. Keiser