

## Testimony of DR. LISA LEDUC

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 Dr. Lisa Leduc, I am a Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Maine at Presque Isle and I am writing to share why support for the critical funding in LD 875 is so important.

I have worked with the Hope and Justice Project (formerly the Battered Women's Project) since my move to Maine almost 23 years ago. During this time, I have been a hotline volunteer and a member (and past chair) of their Board of Directors. I have also worked, along with my students, for the Hope and Justice Project on several different activities and trainings over the years.

I believe that the signature service provided by Hope and Justice Project (HJP) is their end-to-end support of individuals and families effected by domestic violence. From the 24/7 helpline to emergency and transitional housing, to community and business trainings and individual outreach, to court support and advocacy and beyond – staff and volunteers meet victims where they are; to provide timely and empathetic support. The numbers show how these services are embedded within our community: in 2024, 1038 distinct individuals used HJP services; that is 1 out of every 61 Aroostook County residents. Most of those individuals served also have children, so HJP is impacting about 20% of our population.

It should not go unnoticed that these services have been provided DESPITE chronic under-funding. There are many areas where there is a need in our County for expansion of services and not only has that not been achievable; several HJP standard services have been cut. These include essential things like outreach staffing hours, community education, and children's advocacy. Most concerning, the funding crisis has impacted the ability of HJP to recruit and maintain good quality staff because of low and static pay ranges.

When an individual is experiencing abuse in their life, their needs are immediate and essential – whenever and however they choose to reach out for help. It is imperative that a quality agency with deep community roots be available to answer that call. Without significant legislative support we are at risk of more calls for help going unanswered.

Please support LD 875 to ensure that critical domestic violence services remain available. Your support will also send a clear message that domestic violence is not tolerated in our communities and that survivors deserve support.

Thank you for your attention,  
Lisa Leduc, PhD  
Professor of Criminal Justice