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caring-unlimited.org

Testimony of Susan Giambalvo on behalf of Caring Unlimited
In Support of LD 875 An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence
March 19, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representatives Meyers, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Susan Giambalvo and I am writing on behalf of Caring Unlimited, York County's Domestic Resource Center serving York County, to share why support for this critical funding is so important.

As a member of Maine's network of Domestic Violence Resource Centers, Caring Unlimited provides 24/7 critical, wrap-around services for survivors of domestic abuse and their children and essential support, training, and information for community response systems. Caring Unlimited serves almost 2000 adults and children annually and thousands more with training and youth education.

I testified in a previous budget hearing about the importance of ensuring current funding for victim services and filling the VOCA gap, a loss in Federal dollars that is, we hope, temporarily threatening victims services across the board. In addition to providing funds that fill the shortfall, there is a urgent need to increase the level of support for our life saving programs.

The state has not invested enough to support lifesaving services or fulfill the state's commitment to victims of domestic violence. Domestic Violence victimization sits at the intersection of so many other important issues in our communities--child abuse and neglect, homelessness, unemployment and underemployment, and public health. The services Caring Unlimited and other Domestic Violence Resource Centers provide are critical to the functioning of other systems that our communities rely upon and expect to keep them safe and ensure that justice is served; systems that are already stressed and limited in the types of support and interventions they can offer victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Why the urgency? Here are some emails and conversations that I had just today while working on this testimony.

- How many personal alarms does the grant cover again? We need to order all of them.
- I have to cancel our meeting because I have a high risk response team meeting that I need to facilitate with our law enforcement and district attorney partners.
- We have three people in shelter with accessibility needs but only one available bedroom. How long can we afford to provide hoteling for the other two people? Also we have to make sure they have food, clothes, laundry and other needs met at the hotel. They don't have transportation.
- Is it okay if I work on Saturday to meet a client to help her buy groceries?
- The sprinkler system is sounding an emergency alarm, the repair people are on their way.
- How much financial assistance can we provide to a survivor behind on car payments? If she can keep the car, she can keep her job.

Commented [F51]: We serve 15,000 people...12,000 of whom are victims of abuse and violence



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At Caring Unlimited, the value of the state's share of contract funding is shrinking, meaning not only that we can't expand to meet needs in our community but that we cannot even sustain levels of service. All of our costs continue to rise—wages alone have increased 30% statewide. We put significant resources into raising other private or competitive grant funds; but in the end, the dollars we raise subsidize our core, state contracted services instead of expanding them to meet the need. We have already made hard choices about what we can offer and who can receive it because we have cut staffing, reduced levels of assistance, and curtailed programs.

- Caring Unlimited no longer offers in person support groups or standing office hours at satellite locations throughout the county. We do not have staff capacity or travel funds to support it.
- We eliminated our Parent Support program. This program offered parenting education and support groups, connected kids to special services, and planned recreational activities to promote healthy family bonding and reduce the impact of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences on children exposed to domestic violence.
- We stopped providing court accompaniment except in the most high-risk situations, leaving victims without a key source of support, maybe their only source of support, at an emotionally difficult and traumatic time.

At the same time, the needs of the people we serve are increasing in complexity, degree, and risk level. 58% of the victims we served last year used two or more CU programs. Statewide, calls to the helpline have increased and the number of volunteers helping to answer has decreased.

Our system partners are also under strain and rely on us to be there to help in ways they cannot. We support every Protection from Abuse court docket, increasing the courts efficacy and efficiency, for almost 700 cases a year. We receive direct referrals from Child Protective Services to help victims of DV and their children find safety from abuse. And law enforcement send us the police reports for every domestic violence crime in York County so we can step in, call every victim, and ensure they have the information and access to resources they need to support their safety in the aftermath of an immediate crisis.

What will a failure to keep pace with the cost of providing services mean to York County?

We will see more deaths. Half of all homicides in Maine are domestic abuse homicides¹. In 27 cases reviewed in the most recent homicide review panel report, only one victim of intimate partner homicide was working with a community-based advocacy organization, and only one victim had a protection from abuse order². Our services are homicide prevention.

Without increased investment in domestic violence services, more victims will not get a service they need at the time they need it most. Maybe, they won't even know that help is available.

¹ [14th DAHRP Report Final word 1.23.24 - accessible.pdf](#) (pg 7)

² Ibid. (pg 15)



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- We will not have the capacity to engage with survivors beyond the immediate crisis or address the broader safety needs of adult survivors and their children.
- We will not be able to make advocate-initiated calls to victims named in police reports leaving them with no information or connection to resources, support, and safety planning.
- We will not be able to help meet the longer-term needs for economic self-sufficiency that help people stay free from abuse once they have risked everything to leave.
- We will not be in classrooms to help youth learn healthy relationships behaviors and prevent future harm from abuse.
- We will not be able to help every Protection from Abuse plaintiff who wants our support and assistance, leaving many to face their abuser alone and navigate an intimidating court system in the wake of trauma.

Maine can do better for victims of domestic violence. With 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men experiencing serious physical violence from an intimate partner³ and more than one third of DV survivors becoming homeless immediately after separating from their abusive partner⁴, we can't afford not to.

Please ensure that critical domestic violence services remain available, effective, confidential, and free. Make it clear that domestic violence has no home in our state and take action to increase ongoing funding for domestic violence services in Maine's biennial budget.

³ [Domestic Violence Statistics - The Hotline](#)

⁴ [NRCDV-Stats-DVHomelessness](#)