

Testimony of Melissa Hackett
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In support, LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Melissa Hackett. I am offering testimony on behalf of the Maine Child Welfare Action Network in support of LD 875.

We all care about the safety and well-being of children in Maine. To keep children safe, we must focus our efforts on ensuring supports and services are available for families in times of need. This includes economic and concrete supports like child care, housing, food, and health care, and access to services for substance use, mental health, and domestic violence. Decades of research and evidence shows us this is what works to keep children safe and limit the need for intensive and traumatic state child welfare agency intervention. Much of this understanding and the strategies and activities that support that are outlined in Maine's recently released long-term Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan.ⁱ

Every family is unique, and the challenges they experience to safety and stability are complex, nuanced, and often layered. In 2023, when children in Maine were removed from their homes and taken into state custody, domestic violence was cited as a reason 25% of the time (multiple reasons might be cited).ⁱⁱ For the non-offending parent, a failure to protect the child from exposure to domestic violence – even if the child is not the subject of the abuse and violence – can be cause for losing custody of a child. It is well documented that the separation of a child from their parent(s) is traumatic, with lasting impacts on their health and well-being.ⁱⁱⁱ Recognizing this, we should do everything possible to ensure survivors get the support they need to retain or regain custody of their children.

For survivors to provide safety and stability for their children, it is critical that they have access to holistic, non-judgmental services that provide that support. Some data^{iv} that helps to illustrate what this support looks like, and the reach and impact it has for families impacted by domestic violence in Maine:

- In 2024, Advocates from the MCEDV (Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence) network worked with 14,810 people statewide. 12,385 of those were directly experiencing abuse and violence. 48% of adults served had at least one child in their home.

- In 2024, of those served, 2,418 people received housing help, including emergency sheltering, transitional support, housing navigation, homelessness prevention, and housing problem solving.
- 324 households, including 218 children, found refuge in emergency sheltering problems in 2024.

At a time where there continues to be much attention and concern about the safety and well-being of Maine children, it is essential that supports and services that help families get what they need, when they need it, are sustained. When survivors have access to domestic violence services, they have a better chance of keeping or regaining custody of their children and providing for their safety and stability. This is better for children, their families, and our communities. We urge the committee to support this legislation as an essential part of Maine's efforts to keep children safe by keeping families strong. Thank you.

ⁱ Maine's Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan, <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/CSFWB%202025-2030.pdf>

ⁱⁱ 2024 Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book, https://www.mekids.org/site/assets/files/2567/2024_kidscount_databook.pdf, page 19

ⁱⁱⁱ American Bar Association, Trauma Caused by Separation of Children from Parents, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/litigation_committees/childrights/child-separation-memo/parent-child-separation-trauma-memo.pdf

^{iv} Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, Statistics, <https://www.mcedv.org/learn-about-abuse/statistics/>