

Testimony of Karen Wyman, on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence in Support of LD 1294: “An Act to Expand the Dependent Exemption Tax Credit” Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation, I am writing on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV) in support of LD 1294.

Most survivors of domestic abuse and violence in Maine experience economic abuse from their partner. Financial issues create real and lasting barriers to survivors separating from the person causing them harm, and child support is rarely paid as ordered by the court. In response to what we have learned from survivors about the prevalence of economic abuse and the barriers to safety and stability it presents, MCEDV and our member programs have built our capacity both to talk to survivors about their financial struggles and to help support survivors in addressing these issues. Through this work with survivors, we have seen that a little goes a long way.

Through private philanthropy, MCEDV has been able to create and sustain our Liberation Fund, which allows advocates across the state to help survivors with concrete financial needs that a survivor articulates as a barrier to safety. This has included things like: paying for new tires for their car, so that they can get to work and get their children to school; covering the cost of next semester's textbooks as they continue their education; paying an overdue credit card bill, so that it doesn't go into collections and damage their credit; and supporting the cost of getting utilities turned back on. What we have observed through our Liberation Fund program is that just the relatively small amount of financial support that we are able to offer (the average request of our fund is less than \$600 per survivor) can be enough to support a family with no to low income to live and work in their community more safely and with greater stability. Doubling the state Dependent Exemption Tax Credit will make a difference to the families who receive it in much the same way. An extra \$300 may not seem like much, but when you need groceries, gas and car repairs, school supplies, and yet another pair of new shoes, it feels huge. We see this every time we successfully expand credits that benefit families with low and moderate incomes. Putting just a little more money in a family's hands to spend on the things they need most can be transformational.

For so many of the survivors that our network supports, just a little bit of help decreases economic barriers to creating a safe and stable independent household for themselves and their child, away from the person harming them. This is one way to increase the long-term wellbeing of children in Maine, a wise investment at any point in time. We urge you to support LD 1294 to help parents, including those who have survived domestic abuse, to create safe and stable homes. Thank you.