

Good morning Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

My name is Margaret Libby.

I reside in South Portland and my children and I are survivors of decades of domestic abuse. I grew up in a toxic home where I was abused by family and family friends for years, where there was no accountability and the abuse was left unchecked and I was never protected.

In the 80s and 90s you did not talk about the abuse that occurred in your home. No one wanted to hear you were being sexually, physically, or emotionally abused and were told it was your fault for how you dressed or how you acted. So, after a lifetime of being told "it's your fault" and "you deserved it", you believe it.

When I was in High School I was raped by the son of a local pastor. When I told anyone I was told I was gossiping and causing issues for no reason. I was told I needed to stop slandering others and instead of being protected I was ostracized, shamed, and shunned.

For two years this boy taunted, stalked, and harassed me to the point I was hospitalized for depression and suicidal ideologies in high schools. I finally had the courage to get a restraining order and was forced out of my school since his siblings went there as well. The only thing the protection order taught me, at the ripe age of 17 after two years of terror, was that a restraining order is just a construct written on a piece of paper that only holds standing if anyone else believes in it as well.

I learned quickly that law enforcement cares less about that piece of paper than the courts and the abusers.

When I was 20 years old I met a man that was able to swindle me into marrying him by using smoke and mirrors to make me believe he was someone he wasn't.

I was married within six months to a man I thought had a good career path, good moral standing, came from a good family, and adored me.

I was, barely, 21 standing in a white dress in front of our friends and family when he swore to god and everyone else he would love and cherish me, and the family that would be started that day, forever. It didn't take long for that to change.

As soon as he had a ring on my finger and child in my belly, which happened within months of the wedding, he flipped a switch.

The same sexual, physical, emotional, and financial terror I grew up in showed up in my marriage. I found out the educated man I married had an 8th grade education and his father was In jail for molesting foster children he collected to receive money from the state.

I would be raped, pinned against walls, yelled at, deprived of basic needs, demeaned and belittled every day as he, at the same time, forced me to portray the perfect Christian wife and PTA member. When I went to the church for counseling and help I was told if I provided my wifely duties more and encouraged him to be the man of god he is that my life would be better. For a decade I was told it was my fault for being a nagging wife.

I finally left and took out a restraining order. The town I lived in even put in a silent VARDA alarm in my home. They thought he was dangerous enough to have a silent alarm put in my home but not dangerous enough to ever charge him or hold him accountable for his actions, ever.

Once he no longer had access to me, and the court did not give a permanent order for my children, he took the opportunity to pick my children up for a planned six week visit as I moved homes so that I could do so more smoothly, my children were young and I was undergoing cancer treatments. Without a support system locally and moving out of state I had no other option that would not disrupt the children even more.

During those six weeks he refused to let me talk to my children. I would drive up to check on them and he would take them out of the house and not tell me where they were. This went on for 5 years. I filed every single thing you could imagine with local and state agencies and nothing was done because he was the biological father.

While they were with him he told my children that I was a drug addict, prostitute, thief, and (in his mind) the worst thing a person could be... Homosexual. In reality I was a mother fighting for her children and their safety.

He told this to the schools as well and told them I abused and neglected my children and was able to change schools multiple times without my permission even though I technically had full custody and equal parental rights.

While the whole time he was the one abusing and neglecting them.

I had dhhs called on me so many times due to his, outright lies, that they finally actually put a note in the files that I am a chronically ill woman doing the best I can and am being harassed by these reports but they never once did anything to protect me from the person harassing me.

Once I was finally able to rescue my children from him my daughter came out about the years of sexual abuse she suffered during the time of her enslavement from her father. That case is still sitting on the desk of the Oxford County DA's office two years later.

This man broke restraining orders over 75 times over 11 years, sexually abused his wife and daughter, physically, financially, and emotionally tormented his wife, daughter, and son. He was found in contempt of court multiple times, and has a record to begin with for petty crimes.

I was married April 13, 2002. This week that marriage would be an adult old enough to drink, that is how long he has been getting away with absolutely no accountability for his actions.

In 21 years he has gotten off Scot free except for time off work from me dragging him to court where a judge often will just find him guilty with no sanctions, yes... that happens to abusers in this state. Not only does this man walk free he is now remarried with three stepchildren and a new baby playing godly "father of the year" at a new church.

On the other hand, I would like to tell you about when a former partner was arrested.

I was briefly engaged after my divorce to a man who was not as he seemed.

He was a contract attorney that worked for some of the oldest and biggest institutions in our country and a widow with two sons.

It wasn't until after we had been together for a while I made the connection that he was "of counsel" to these organizations because he had been disbarred for "moral turpitude" due to mishandling trust funds to fuel his own lifestyle of drug, sex, and rock and roll while his dying wife stayed home raising their children. At this point I was already trying to get out.

One time we were out to eat at a seaside restaurant when he became drunk and abusive in public. This scared me more than normal because he kept this level of abuse hidden.

With new marks on my arms, from just sitting at the bar and deciding I did not want a mother glass of Prosecco so I could drive since he seemed to be over indulging and wasn't able to, I got up and went to the car for a sweater because I said I was cold.

I had had a bit more than I should have in order to drive but I knew I had to go to save my life. I drove straight into the local police station, literally... into it. I was so feverous I actually hit the building while parking. I remember walking in in tears with fresh bruises as well as old. I let them know everything that was going on and detailed the absolute terror of abuse and confinement I lived in.

They took my statement and said a car was already on the way to get them since someone already called in about the incident.

They then took me to the local hospital to be looked over and evaluated.

My ex was in court for a total of 1 1/2 hours before being released. The judge was even a gold and tennis buddy of his and one of the bailiffs even fronted him the \$50 bail that was placed on him until his attorney could get there since his wallet was in the car that was impounded at the police station since he did not have a valid registration, inspection, insurance, and was still under his wife's name who passed three years earlier.

Not only did they let him out, they let him come and discharge me from the hospital. The same hospital I was back in weeks later with a fractured skull and more bruises on my arms and legs but nobody ever batted an eye.

The charges were dropped before arraignment

I left for good not long after. In the time we were together I was in intensive care 5 times from his abuse and two of those times on life support.

Today he is now still free and has abused many women since

My story is not uncommon

It is just uncommon to be brave enough to get up here and speak about the abuse you endure. I could go on for hours giving specific details or telling stories from survivors I know, including my own daughter who at 1% had to file a protection order on a 1% year old boy who continually broke it with no type of sanction put on him at all who is now 18 and has a string of girls speaking out about their abuse but is still touted as an exemplary athlete.

Or any number of women I have helped get free to find the courts and law enforcement have no interest in ensuring their safety but to only protect the guilty.

I was once told by a therapist that the old saying "hurt people hurt people" is outdated and wrong. It needs to be changed to "people only do what they think they can get away with"

We have had decades of systemic abuse against women and children because men are not held accountable for their actions.

It is time we make perpetrators accountable and to let them know that there is no excuse for domestic abuse

Passing LD 692 is a good first step to hold these monsters accountable for their actions.

I would like to thank you for your time and I hope when it comes time to vote you remember my story as well as my daughter's and every other story you heard here today.

It is time we stopped protecting the abusers and start protecting their victims

Thank you