



The Maine Coalition
to End Domestic Violence

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**Testimony of Andrea Mancuso, on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence
In Support of LD 1116: “An Act to Provide Rural Sober Living Housing for Mothers”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
Tuesday, April 25, 2023**

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, I am writing on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV)¹ in support of LD 1116, “An Act to Provide Rural Sober Living Housing for Mothers.”

It is not uncommon for survivors of domestic abuse and violence to have co-occurring substance use disorder – either because their abuser has forced or coerced their use or because their use has developed as a way to help cope with the abuse. Our network works with hundreds of mothers each year who are struggling with substance use for these reasons.² The availability of substance use recovery services in rural Maine is nearly non-existent, and there just are not options for substance affected parents with small children. As a result, though our programs provide as much support, advocacy and direct connections to other community resources as they can, helping survivors struggling with substance use recovery to achieve real safety and stability for themselves and their children is often an unattainable goal.

The needs of survivors of domestic abuse and violence are almost always complex – largely requiring a person to rebuild their entire lives and support systems – and even more so when the survivor is a parent and a parent whose struggles include substance use. Our communities and system responses are not only not resourced to support the full range of their needs, these survivors, in fact, face real risks of losing custody of their children by even admitting their substance use and asking for help; because help is mostly unavailable, and so the State then needs to intervene. A lack of recovery resources results in the reality that the

¹ MCEDV represents a membership of the eight regional domestic violence resource centers across Maine as well as the Immigrant Resource Center of Maine. Last year, our programs provided services to more than 12,000 survivors of domestic abuse and violence and their children in our state, this included sheltering more than 261 children with their parents in our network of emergency shelters.

² Over the last few years, the prevalence of significant substance use amongst the survivors we serve and shelter has meant shelter advocates across the network have not only all had to receive training in the administration of Narcan, several of our programs have had to use it in response to overdoses within their facilities. This compounds not only the trauma of the family directly impacted, but also the other residents seeking refuge from abuse in our shelters and the ability of our staff to sustain themselves in this work.

mothers we work with are all too often functionally forced to choose between being open about their struggle and trying (often unsuccessfully, at least in the short term) to get the support they need for their recovery on the one hand or hiding their struggle in an effort to keep custody of their children on the other. With LD 1116, policymakers and appropriators have an opportunity to start eliminating the need for families in rural Maine to be faced with that impossible choice.

Children in Maine are dying from exposure to their parents' substance use. Even where they are not, their parents' substance use is likely to negatively impact these children in a variety of ways throughout their lifespan. It is critical that support is given to programs like the one proposed in LD 1116 that will help prevent this by supporting parents to recover and become healthy caregivers to their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our strong support for expanded access to recovery services for parents in Maine, particularly in Maine's rural communities. MCEDV and our member programs are happy to provide any additional information that might be helpful to the Committee as you continue your work on this bill.

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