

Testimony of Teri Belanger
In Support of LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crime
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
1/23/24

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Teri Belanger, I am from Westbrook, and I am writing in support of LD 2084 and the need for funding to maintain essential victim services in Maine.

To whom it May Concern,

My name is Teri Lee Belanger. On October 30th, 2023 I was the victim of a very serious, high profile domestic violence incident. In the blink of an eye my entire life changed, broadcasted for the whole world to see.

I was taken for an ambulance ride that I could not afford, to receive emergency medical care for my physical injuries that I could not pay for with insurance or my own money. My home was a crime scene that I could not return to. Myself and my son were in immediate danger, with just the clothes on our backs.

The following day I was warmly taken in by Through These Doors. An advocate sat with me while I was extensively interviewed, my injuries heavily documented by a detective. We met privately to talk in depth about my experience and the severity of my situation. I had been financially abused, and was not going to be able to pay my rent the following day, facing eviction. I was missing classes for my professional education, my employment contingent on these certifications. I would later lose this job for not completing them.

My advocate was able to help find funds to pay for the entire month of my rent, to give myself and my son a safe place to stay while we recovered. I was given a SCOUT Alarm security system by the domestic violence detective at Westbrook Police Department. This has helped protect my home on a daily basis, giving me peace of mind even while our safety is still at risk to this day. My advocate directed me to the resource of the Maine Victims Compensation program to help aid in paying for the emergency services and hospital stay. She also gave me a referral to Pine Tree Legal Assistance Inc to help me fight for my PFA in court.

As a result of my situation I have had heavy involvement in the court system, attending numerous court dates with more to come. I am a witness in numerous court cases. Every step of the way I have had support, whether through the 24/7 crisis line, meetings with my advocate, weekly support groups, or the physical presence of an advocate with me at every court appearance.

They have all given invaluable supports, that I would otherwise not be able to obtain on my own. I am a single mother, who lost everything in a moment. I lost my home, my income source, my education, my support system, my mental health forever impacted.

If I was not able to access these supports I would have been homeless with a child, without an income to pay for a roof over my head, food to eat, or a means to pay for everyday expenses. I would not have access to healthcare or mental health services for myself or my son. When a person's immediate needs are not met, they are not able to focus on anything else. They are in survival mode. They are thinking about their safety and their next minute, not their next day, week or month, the world just a blur.

These services act as the brain, the body, the heart, and the soul. They have stepped in and been mine when I have felt nothing but a complete broken shell of a person. They have been my shoulder to cry on, my confidant, my advocate, my cheerleader and the support system I have always dreamed of when no one else has been there. I have not just been reminded, but shown that I am not alone. I am a survivor, not just a victim.

You cannot truly put a price tag on something that is invaluable. My experience cost me my entire life, and almost my literal life taken away from me and my children. But through the help, support and guidance of programs like Through These Doors I was given a second chance at life. I am standing here, having the opportunity to tell you my story and return the favor of advocating for the cause. My voice was taken away, but with their support I have regained it. I thank you for listening to me, and for taking the time and consideration to hear my story.