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Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Karen Wyman. I am the Director of Prevention and Intervention at the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV). MCEDV supports LD 1877: An Act to Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty in Maine.

In 2019, MCEDV surveyed over 130 Maine survivors and found that, “economic instability reduces safety options for survivors and makes them more vulnerable to continued violence and isolation.” The ability to access safety often hinges on access to economic resources. While abuse can occur in any income bracket, people in poverty are nearly twice as likely to experience domestic violence.<sup>1</sup> Nearly half of the survivors surveyed relied on public assistance to support themselves and their families, and nearly half of them specifically depended on TANF. Last year, 1,186 people, including 551 children, were served through DVRCs’ residential programs such as emergency shelter, transitional support, housing navigation, and homelessness prevention.

The current monthly TANF benefit for a family of 3 is just \$733, the lowest of any New England state. Survivors, even after they have separated from a partner who has been abusive, must constantly manage the potential danger to themselves and their children, and they are often doing this with few material resources and a great deal of complexity, both practical and emotional. Survivors of domestic abuse, along with all families living in deep poverty, need an increase in monthly TANF rates to meet their basic needs; and they need a simpler, streamlined process for accessing these essential supports.

Accessing resources to help families in deep poverty make rent, get to school and work, and buy essential household supplies should reduce their burdens, not add to them. The hassles required to access these essential supports can too often be a barrier to families receiving the help they need to meet basic needs – and the funds rarely cover the full cost of those basic needs.

How far can \$733 each month go when it must cover diapers, rent, toilet paper, dish soap, school clothes, winter coats, transportation costs, cold medicine, and so many other expected and unexpected costs? Families are trying to stretch these meager funds at a time

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<sup>1</sup> “Economic Coercion and Survivor Centered Economic Advocacy.” Guidebook On Consumer & Economic Civil Legal Advocacy For Survivors. Center For Survivor Agency & Justice. 2017. (Cited in MCEDV’s A Report on the Economic Abuse on Survivors of Domestic Violence in Maine, 2019.)

when Maine's housing and other costs of living are already high. The math just doesn't work. No matter how much families budget, scrimp, and save, they need more to meet their basic needs, especially when those families are managing the impact of domestic abuse and violence.

Mainers take care of each other. In LD 1877, we have the chance to take better care of some of the most vulnerable Mainers, those families living in deep poverty, including domestic abuse survivors and their children. We can offer these vulnerable families an increase in their monthly support to keep pace with rising costs of living, and we can make it easier for them to access these essential supports with LD 1877. I urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1877, An Act to Reduce the Number of Children Living in Deep Poverty In Maine.