



Administrative Office of the Courts

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Judicial Branch testimony neither for nor against LD 586, An Act to Provide a Court Authority to Issue Proximity Restrictions in Protection From Abuse Orders:

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Julie Finn and I represent the Judicial Branch. I would like to provide the following testimony regarding LD 586.

This bill was proposed in the last session, as LD 2103. The Judicial Branch took no position but indicated that a fiscal note would be necessary. Protection orders are communicated to law enforcement immediately over what is called the "switch" and programming would have to be completed in order to communicate the proximity restrictions allowed by this bill. The amount of the fiscal note was \$6,200.

In the time between the adjournment of the last session and the start of this session, the Judicial Branch has been able to secure federal funding for the technology upgrades required to effectuate the bill. Thus the Judicial Branch does not have technology needs with respect to LD 586.

However, it is worth noting that changes to the protection from abuse laws have a far-reaching impact. This includes technology and programming but may also include printing and translations. Because many parties in protection from abuse matters do not have the assistance of counsel, it is important and valuable for the Judicial Branch to provide clear, easy-to-understand guidance to the public. We prepare and distribute at all courthouses, a booklet entitled "A Guide to Protection From Abuse and Harassment Cases." We print paper versions and it is also linked on the Judicial Branch website. The booklet is 48 pages long and includes a list of forms, a frequently asked questions section, as well as guidance on how to file a complaint and what to expect at a hearing.

Even small changes to the law will usually require the re-printing of the booklets and recycling of old ones. It is, of course, very important that the information that we disseminate be up-to-date and accurate.

In addition, there are many parties in Maine for whom English is not their first language. The Judicial Branch guide must also be translated into eight different languages.

The Judicial Branch will make every attempt to cover these expenses with already budgeted funds or available grants. At times it will be necessary to assess a fiscal impact.

The Judicial Branch will not need to add a fiscal note to LD 586, or LD 670 regarding coercive control, or other protection from abuse bills that may not yet be printed because we have already contracted for new printing and translations. We can pause the printing until we know whether these current LDs will become law. This may not always be the case. We wanted to make you aware of the potential fiscal repercussions.

The Judicial Branch requests that the effective date of this legislation be extended to January 1, 2026 to allow time for programming the Metro “switch.” The “switch” is an interface between the Judicial Branch and the Department of Public Safety over which protection from abuse orders are transmitted. Programming of the switch involves both entities. The effective date we are requesting is based on our best estimate of how long the Judicial Branch needs to complete our work for implementation. We have no control over the schedule and timing of work that is completed by other agencies.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.