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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Holly Eaton introducing
LD 670, An Act to Address Coercive Control in Domestic Abuse Cases
Before the Judiciary Committee

Good morning, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Holly Eaton, and I represent House District 15, which includes the communities of Deer Isle, Stonington, Brooklin, Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Frenchboro, Swan's Island, Isle au Haut and Vinalhaven. I am here today to introduce LD 670, An Act to Address Coercive Control in Domestic Abuse Cases.

Domestic abuse extends beyond physical violence. For many survivors, coercive control—the manipulation, domination, and isolation of a partner or family member—is at the core of their abuse. Currently, Maine law does not explicitly recognize coercive control as a form of domestic abuse, leaving many victims without legal protection. LD 670 seeks to close this gap by adding coercive control to our protection-from-abuse statutes, ensuring that survivors of non-physical abuse can seek relief.

The need for this legislation is urgent. A constituent reached out to share the experience of a close family member who endured years of coercive control and psychological abuse. Despite being financially responsible for their household, they faced behaviors designed to isolate, manipulate, and intimidate them. Like many survivors, they struggled to navigate a legal system that did not recognize the full extent of the abuse they suffered.

District 15: Brooklin, Deer Isle, Eagle Island Township, Frenchboro, Southwest Harbor, Stonington, Swan's Island, Tremont, Isle au Haut, Vinalhaven

This case underscores how critical it is to include coercive control in Maine's legal protections.

LD 670 defines coercive control as a pattern of behavior designed to dominate, isolate, manipulate, or exploit a dating partner, family, or household member. It includes:

- **Restricting** access to financial resources or employment
- **Monitoring** or limiting movement, communication, or daily activities
- **Isolating** the victim from friends, family, or support systems
- **Using** intimidation, threats, or coercion to create fear or dependency
- **Exploiting** vulnerabilities such as immigration status, disabilities, or mental health conditions

While this bill is a significant step forward, I want to acknowledge a concern raised by stakeholders: economic abuse, while an essential part of coercive control, is rarely experienced in isolation. Survivors who are preparing to leave their abuser may take steps to protect their finances, which could be misconstrued as coercion under an improperly applied law. To prevent misuse, I propose refining **Section A** of the bill to specify that financial control must be part of a larger pattern of coercive behavior rather than an isolated act. This ensures that the law protects survivors without enabling abusers to weaponize the legal system against their victims.

Maine is not alone in addressing this issue. Several states, including California, Hawaii, New York, and Connecticut, have already recognized coercive control in their domestic violence laws. Internationally, countries such as the United Kingdom, Scotland, and Australia have enacted similar protections. It is time for Maine to do the same.

LD 670 is a survivor-centered bill that acknowledges the realities of domestic abuse and provides critical protections for those in danger. I urge this committee to support LD 670 and affirm Maine's commitment to protecting survivors of all forms of domestic violence. Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.

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