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To Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the committee,

My name is Christine Buckley and I have been a Maine resident since 1987 and have resided in Waldo county since 2002.

I am here today to speak about how important it is to include coercive control in the legal definition of abuse here in Maine.

Since I joined Patrisha McLean's grassroots organization Finding Our Voices about 5 years ago, I have had the honor to get to know with many women who have had the experience of being trapped in abusive relationships. I intentionally use the word "trapped" because I have heard countless stories from women who were afraid to leave their abusive partners because of REPEATED violent, horrific and terrifying threats from those abusive partners in an effort to manipulate the women into staying in the relationship. Threats like,

"If you leave me, I will kill myself."

"If you leave me, I will kill your dog."

"If you leave me, I will kill you."

"If you leave me, I will kill your children."

Imagine, for a moment, how paralyzing it might be to hear these kinds of threats knowing that it is unlikely that the police or the courts will take those threats as seriously and she does.

The question needs to change from:

"WHY DOESN'T SHE LEAVE HER ABUSER?"

to

"WHAT IS HE DOING TO KEEP HER TRAPPED?"

I have personally experienced coercive control. In 2000, when my first child was born, her abusive birthfather repeatedly threatened to kill my dog when I would not agree to stay with him. He stalked me, threw rocks at my windows, left notes on my car pleading with me to "stop this nonsense and just be a family

together". The police only offered unhelpful advice like "so maybe don't let your dog out after dark" and "just give it some time and things will die down."

I couldn't sleep. I was afraid to leave the house. I was afraid to leave my infant daughter in daycare so I could not go to work. That coercive control of my life went on for 18 months until he lost his parental rights in court. In my case, I was not persuaded to stay with my abuser, but he emotionally tortured me for 18 months and cost me thousands of dollars in legal fees and yet he was never charged with any crime.

COERCIVE CONTROL needs to be legally recognized as a commonly used means of keeping women trapped in abusive relationships. And the police need to start asking different questions when investigating domestic violence calls for help.

A year ago this week, the Gabby Petito Bill was passed in Florida requiring that police officers ask 12 important questions when called to a DV dispute to assess the situation. Questions 2, 6 and 11 address methods of coercive control. (See questions)

Our law enforcement should certainly be asking the same questions here in Maine. But let us begin by passing this bill to add COERCIVE CONTROL to our state's legal definition of ABUSE.

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely,

Christine Buckley
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The Gabby Petito Act - 12 Questions

1. Did the aggressor ever use a weapon against you or threaten you with a weapon?
2. ***Did the aggressor ever threaten to kill you or your children?***
3. Do you believe the aggressor will try to kill you?
4. Has the aggressor ever choked you or attempted to choke you?
5. Does the aggressor have a gun or could the aggressor easily obtain a gun?
6. ***Is the aggressor violently or constantly jealous, or does the aggressor control most of your daily activities?***
7. Did you leave or separate from the aggressor after you were living together or married?
8. Is the aggressor unemployed?
9. To the best of your knowledge, has the aggressor ever attempted suicide?
10. Do you have a child whom the aggressor believes is not the aggressor's biological child?
11. ***Has the aggressor ever followed, spied on, or left threatening messages for you?***
12. Is there anything else that worries you about your safety and, if so, what worries you?