

Finding Our Voices

Survivors Breaking the Silence
of Domestic Abuse
FindingOurVoices.net

Finding Our Voices
PO Box 943
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March 3, 2025

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

I am Patrisha McLean, CEO and founder of Finding Our Voices and I support LD670, An Act to Address Coercive Control in Domestic Abuse Cases.

Finding Our Voices is the grassroots nonprofit providing peer-support and resources to Maine women survivors of domestic abuse.

In Camden, I sat with a woman I will call Cathy who had been rescued by her best friend a few days earlier after texting that friend, "He almost killed me last night". She and her three children were living with that friend until they could figure out the next steps.

Cathy was 32 years old. She had been with her husband since she was 15. They lived in a trailer down a long dirt road. She wasn't allowed to work. She didn't have a car and he was constantly breaking her cell phone.

While Cathy was telling me this, she kept her hand over her mouth. When she said to me you have beautiful teeth, I asked her about her own teeth and why she was covering them up.

Her teeth were black and broken. Why? Because in the years she lived with her husband he did not "let her" brush them.

He didn't tell her she couldn't brush her teeth. Coercive control AKA emotional abuse is more insidious than that.

Starting soon after they met, and over time, he filled her with fear of doing the wrong thing to set him off and there were more and more things she had to avoid doing, with new and always ridiculous things added all the time. This served to keep her in a constant and debilitating state of terror.

can't id →

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At some point, every time she started to brush her teeth he would say "Oh, you're making yourself beautiful for your boyfriend." She would try to defend herself, but that would just ramp things up.

So in the end, it was safer for her to just stop brushing her teeth. She also stopped going to the dentist. When she had an appointment, he would sabotage it and he made her feel she was not worth the money for dental treatment. The problems with her teeth stemming from coercive control impacted her physical health, robbed her of her confidence, and socially isolated her. The state of her teeth and health challenges made it hard for her to get a job or get promoted, and robbed her of the ability to be the parent she wanted to be.

My talk with Cathy was the start of a Finding Our Voices program called Finding Our Smiles where 35 dentists including many from Augusta are now providing free and dignified dental care to women survivors of domestic abuse.

Yes, there are cases with Finding Our Smiles that fit the current definition of domestic violence in Maine civil and criminal courts, with women needing dental treatment due to punches in the mouth, being shoved down stairs, and, once, for a baseball bat to the mouth.

But over and over again women applicants to this free dental program tell us they are in desperate need of dental care due to neglect of their teeth from emotional abuse, AKA coercive control.

This is just one example of how insidious and evil and pervasive coercive control is, and also the deep and long-lasting damage that it does. I urge you to follow the lead of States including Hawaii, Connecticut and Massachusetts by adding coercive control to the definition of domestic abuse in Maine.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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