

Testimony of Rebecca Hobbs

Speaking in Support of LD 666: "An Act to Prevent Domestic Violence by Providing Adequate Funding Support for Court-Ordered Certified Domestic Violence Intervention Programs."

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Date of Public Hearing: March 3, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Committee, my name my name is Rebecca Hobbs. I am Co-Executive Director of Through These Doors (TTD), Cumberland County's domestic violence resource center. Through These Doors operates Cumberland County's Certified Domestic Violence Intervention Program for men, called A Different Choice.

In my capacity at TTD, I was responsible for launching the program in 2018. Though adding additional services is a big commitment, we recognized the importance of local CDVIP programming for survivor safety. We also believed that TTD was ideally suited to integrate the program into our local coordinated community response.

As part of the process of program development, I became a trained DVIP educator (sometimes referred to as a facilitator.) I have appreciated the opportunity to teach the class as a way to truly understand the unique challenges of being a CDVIP educator. Pragmatically, it is also difficult to find and retain educators and I can cover classes without TTD paying additional fees to an outside educator. This is fiscally prudent and helpful as finding and retaining qualified educators can be difficult. But since I already have a very full workload, stepping in to teach a class presents challenges to my time and can conflict with other organizational needs.

Thank you for this opportunity to address some of the challenges and opportunities faced by our program in Cumberland County. A Different Choice served 98 to 105 men per month last year and we currently offer six 90-minute classes each week. While we prefer to cap classes at 15 participants each, we have had to increase our regular class size to meet demand. This has been an issue statewide to a significant enough degree that state rules regarding maximum class size were increased in October 2024.

In the early years of CDVIP programming, it was possible for a small organization or even a person or two to run a local program, then called Batterers Intervention. However, the complexities of programs now, the requirements of training, the importance of understanding and engaging in a community's coordinated response, and the numbers of classes necessary to meet the demand mean that the costs of the program always exceed what we can reasonably expect participants to pay. And although many people in our community are interested in the possibilities of creating change through this programming, we have yet to find a foundation or a donor to fund the work.

At Through These Doors, program costs include employee wages, payroll taxes and benefits, facilitator contract fees, program monitor fees, laptops for staff and a TV monitor for the room, staff training fees and curriculum and materials, mileage reimbursement for trainings and meetings, and occupancy costs (including rent, utilities, internet, etc.) Even with regular increases to participant

fees, we can cover only 60% of the direct costs of the program with participant fees plus the reimbursement from MCDV for indigent participants. That reimbursement is an important contributor to the program, allowing low income participants to attend, and was accessed by 20% of program participants last year but it is not enough to fully fund program costs.

The location and features of the space where we hold classes are quite particular, and finding safe, available, and affordable space is a challenge for programs statewide. The right space can be difficult to find and maintain. Not all landlords will allow us to use their space to convene a group of men convicted of domestic violence crimes. Requirements of class space include things like proximity to the city bus line (as many people in Portland rely on the city bus), a location that is central and drivable to all parts of Cumberland County, a venue that is accessible for all, internet service, restrooms, and a large room conducive to learning with a good view of the educators and having enough distance between seats for a healthy environment. Most importantly, the space must be separate from our outreach sites and other spaces where survivors might meet with us. In spite of the real expense and challenge of finding and keeping the right space, we do find that having our own program space, with program materials on the wall and comfortable seating, enhances the experience for attendees and is conducive to participation and learning.

TTD has been operating A Different Choice for eight years. With this experience, we know that the work with men who have chosen to use abuse and violence is an essential part of how we must intervene in and work to prevent future abuse. We believe deeply in opportunity for behavior change our program provides each participant, and with that increased well-being of the person or people they harmed, but sustaining the program is a constant juggling act for us and for programs like us across the state. Maine law recognizes these programs as the appropriate intervention in domestic violence cases and requires the criminal court to order them. We need the state to invest in them as the essential part of Maine's coordinated community response to domestic violence that they are.

Thank you.

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