

Testimony of Sarah Gaetano

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: Monday March 3, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and honorable members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Sarah Gaetano, and I am the Systems Engagement Coordinator at Caring Unlimited; the Domestic Violence Resource Center for York County. As part of my role at Caring Unlimited, I have facilitated Turning Points (the Certified Domestic Violence Intervention Program for female offenders), I have monitored the men's CDVIP's for other agencies around the state, I served on the CDVIP Standards Review Committee, and I convene York County's Domestic Violence Task Force and High-Risk Response Teams.

I am here today to show my support for LD 666 and to highlight the critical need for adequate funding of Maine's Certified Domestic Violence Intervention Programs. I also stand before you on behalf of victims/survivors of domestic violence living in Maine who are counting on their government officials to prioritize their safety and ensure that there are programs in place to hold the people that hurt them accountable.

Prior to 2023, Violence Intervention programming was consistently available in York County for more than forty years. Over the years, the people tasked with leading those programs have changed, but the passion for intervention work and harm reduction has been the common thread that binds them. They do this work because they understand, on a fundamental level, that it is critical to our individual and collective safety. They understand that to have an impact and to make meaningful change, we must get to the root of why people choose to hurt the ones they say they love most. Violence Intervention is the most effective tool we have at excavating those roots and creating a space for abusers to examine their behaviors and choices.

However, in order to do this work effectively, it takes time, money, training and continuity of services statewide. Unfortunately, York County has been without a Certified Domestic Violence Program since August of 2023. During the lapse, we heard from many victims/survivors whose level of fear and distrust in the systems set up to protect them was

at an all-time high. A year and a half without this critical programming was as long as Caring Unlimited was willing to wait until we decided to take it on ourselves. While the CDVIP will be a separate entity – Caring Unlimited will oversee the general operating tasks, maintain the certification status and manage the financial aspects of the program. We will need to leverage victim services dollars to do this. We are not willing to risk someone being killed or seriously harmed because their abuser's case was dismissed or because there was no intervention resource available to them. Though this risk is ever-present, we are doing everything we can to prevent it.

While no system or program is perfect, I have seen firsthand the negative impacts on a community when Violence Intervention Programming is absent. Victims/Survivors will experience more harm, abusers will be more violent and less fearful of consequences, law enforcement, prosecutors, and the courts will be limited in their responses and ultimately, our problems get more serious, and those problems cost the state more money.

On behalf of Caring Unlimited, the individuals we serve, and my colleagues in Violence Intervention work across Maine, I ask this committee to vote in support of LD 666. This funding will keep Maine safer. It will allow systems to do their jobs to the best of their ability. It will show abusers that there are consequences for their actions, and it will save lives.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Sarah Gaetano

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