



Testimony of Lucia Hunt, Esq.
Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc.

Speaking in Support of LD 950

**An Act to Prevent Domestic and Sexual Abuse of Children and Increase Access to
Protection from Abuse Orders by Allowing Children to File Protection from Abuse
Orders on Their Own Behalf
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary**

Date of Public Hearing: March 17, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on
Judiciary,

My name is Lucia Hunt. I am the directing attorney of the Family Law and Victim Rights Unit at
Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc., and I am speaking to you today in support of LD 950, An Act to
Prevent Domestic and Sexual Abuse of Children and Increase Access to Protection from Abuse
Orders by Allowing Children to File Protection from Abuse Orders on Their Own Behalf.

I have been asked to share the perspective of Pine Tree Legal Assistance on these issues and I am
speaking today on behalf of Pine Tree Legal Assistance (Pine Tree). Pine Tree is a nonprofit
organization with offices in Portland, Lewiston, Augusta, Bangor, Machias, and Presque Isle.
Since 1967, Pine Tree has provided free legal services to low-income people throughout the
State of Maine.

Attorneys in Pine Tree's statewide Family Law and Victim Rights unit represent survivors of
domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. In 2024, we represented survivors in 1,326 cases,
primarily Protection from Abuse, family matters, and other civil legal cases related to the
violence they have experienced.

In addition to making necessary updates to the DV advocate statute, this bill will allow victims
under the age of 18 to file protection orders on their own behalf. The current statute requires a
parent, guardian, the Department, or a person responsible for a child to file if the victim is under
the age of 18. In practice, Pine Tree's experience is that this provision is applied inconsistently
across the state and can act as a barrier for older teens to access protection from abuse.

Case examples highlight this problem.

Isabelle:¹ College Student with an Abusive Boyfriend

“Isabelle” is a minor student who attends college in Western Maine and lives in the dorms at her school. Isabelle started dating another student. The relationship quickly turned abusive. Over the course of four months, her boyfriend physically abused her by strangling her, throwing her onto the ground, kicking her, pushing her down a flight of stairs, and more. After her boyfriend sexually assaulted her, Isabelle sought a protection order. However, Isabelle’s mother passed away a few years ago, and her father lives in Maine but travels extensively out-of-state for work, and was not available to file a PFA on her behalf. Alaina, Isabelle’s adult sister, lives nearby. When Alaina attempted to file a PFA on behalf of Isabelle, the temporary order was denied. PTLA provided the advocate working with Isabelle with a Motion to Treat Adult as Person Responsible for a Minor for the Filing of a PFA Complaint. The second time they filed, Isabelle was granted a temporary PFA order. PTLA represented Isabelle and secured a final two-year PFA stating that her abuser could not re-enroll at that school while Isabelle is a student there.

Angela: Abused by Both Parents

“Angela” was physically abused by her mother, Karen, and physically and sexually abused by her father, Mark, starting at the age of 7. When Angela was 16 years old, she ran away from her parents' home to escape the ongoing abuse. Angela walked and hitchhiked about 15 miles to get to her boyfriend’s home where he lived with his parents, Janet and George. For a period of three months, Janet and George housed Angela and provided for her. When her father contacted the school Angela was attending to coordinate picking her up, Angela became very afraid of having to return to her parent’s house. Janet helped Angela file PFAs against both of her parents. However, Angela’s temporary orders were denied due to Janet’s “lack of standing” to file PFAs on behalf of Angela. At this point, PTLA became involved and filed emergency Motions to Reconsider in both PFA cases, arguing that Janet was an adult responsible for Angela according to the statute. Ultimately, Angela’s temporary PFAs were granted.

Nikki: Sexually Abused by her Father

“Nikki’s” father sexually assaulted her. Nikki was almost 18 and had been living with her father since her parents’ separation. Her mother lived in another country and was not involved in Nikki’s life. Nikki mostly stayed at a friend’s house to avoid her father’s abuse. The friend’s mother, Hannah, cooked meals for her and provided housing, clothes, and other support. When Nikki’s dad started reaching out to her, she asked Hannah to file a Protection from Abuse case on her behalf. The judge denied the request, stating that Nikki’s mother had to be the one to file. Nikki’s mother refused to become involved. A DV advocate referred the case to a PTLA attorney who helped Nikki file again, making legal arguments to show that Hannah should be able to file on Nikki’s behalf, and that Nikki’s mother would not help. The judge again denied the request.

¹ Client stories are used with permission but details such as names are de-identified

Nikki was so frustrated that she did not want to appeal that decision or engage further with the court. She went into hiding to avoid her father.

Frances: Relative filed Guardianship after PFA denied

When she was 17 years old, "Frances" ran away from home to escape her mother's severe physical abuse. When Frances filed a PFA against her mother, the judge denied her a temporary order based on her age. Frances had no relationship with her father, meaning there was no other adult with legal standing to request protection on Frances's behalf. Eventually, a family friend obtained emergency, temporary guardianship of Frances. With the help of a Pine Tree attorney, Frances had her new guardian file a PFA against her mother on Frances's behalf to protect Frances from further abuse.

When PTLA becomes involved in a case, we are often able to convince the fact finder to allow another person to file on a minor's behalf. However, these are temporary emergency orders, and attorneys are not usually involved in filing orders, particularly for children. Many young people may never connect with an advocate or attorney and be unable to access the protections that the PFA process provides. As the examples illustrate, the current statute poses barriers that mean that vulnerable children are unable to access the PFA process.

Thank you to Senator Bailey for bringing this bill and to this committee for considering this important change. This bill will ensure that the PFA statute protects children.