

Testimony of Andrea Irwin
In Support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence
March 19, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyers, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Andrea Irwin. I am a survivor of domestic violence and the Director of Human Resources at Partners for Peace, the domestic violence resource center serving Penobscot and Piscataquis counties.

Our executive director Amanda Cost's testimony highlights the importance of this funding to our core programs and services. I would like to tell you more about our staff at Partners for Peace, the incredible people who provide these services.

We currently have 19 full-time employees based in our Bangor and Dover-Foxcroft resource centers and shelter building. Each of us shows up to work every day because we want to make a difference in the lives of others, and in our communities. Many advocates are survivors or have loved ones who have experienced abuse. Some have dedicated their entire careers to this work; others come from other nonprofit or public service backgrounds such as teaching or healthcare. All are committed, caring, and extremely effective at their jobs.

We are a resilient organization and have faced many challenges over the past 50 years. Since experiencing high turnover during the pandemic, we have prioritized taking care of our people. From sustaining pay and benefits to keep up with rising inflation to supporting flexibility in schedules and remote work when possible, these investments have led to increased retention and employee satisfaction. This means better services for survivors who are relying on advocates to be experienced and skilled. But with growing funding uncertainty, our staff are genuinely concerned about their job security. They need to know that this is a worthwhile career path with the potential for growth and longevity. Secured funding means they will feel secure and in turn, can better support survivors seeking safety and security in their own lives. Our focus needs to be on survivor safety, not the potential loss of funding. For survivors doing this work, in particular, this uncertainty impacts our well-being which can lead to impacts on services. How could it not?

We've been having transparent conversations with staff about how we are planning for the possible decreases or even loss in federal funding. While we are hearing they are understandably concerned about their jobs, their biggest concern by far is for survivors. As experts in this work, our advocates know firsthand how important a robust, fully staffed program is for the safety of survivors, and the potential harm cuts will have to the lives of people experiencing abuse and violence.

We are a trauma-informed, survivor-centered workplace – this means that we listen to survivors to learn about what they need. Please listen and hear us – we are all here today, on behalf of thousands of survivors and their loved ones across Maine, to tell you what we need. It's simple: we need these funds.

I am so proud to work at Maine's first DV program and one of the first in the nation, still going strong 50 years later, with such an incredibly talented and passionate team. If we want to keep moving forward to make Maine a safe place for all of us to live peacefully, we need your support. Thank you.