

Testimony of Mariya Pelletier
In Support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
March 19, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Mariya Pelletier from Aroostook County, and I am writing to share why support for this critical funding is so important.

When I was with my abuser, the word "abuse" didn't cross my mind. I knew what I was going through wasn't ok, but it wasn't abuse. Then I became a mother. I wanted more for her than what I accepted for myself. She shouldn't have to grow up in a home where mommy had to lock herself in the bathroom while dad punched holes through the door trying to get to her. His own father use to give him tips on "how to keep me in line." I use to leave our apartment with my head hung down in shame, embarrassed because I knew the neighbors had heard what was happening. I remember him driving erratically, punching the dash, screaming at the top of his lungs with our baby in the backseat. We walked into his mother's house for supper and he switched it off immediately. Calm and poised, he sat down for supper and he said grace. That was the moment I knew I needed help. I have an amazing supportive family but shame kept me from reaching out to them. A friend told me about Hope and Justice Project and I called them. I will never forget the first time I opened up and shared what I was going through with my advocate. The first time my advocate said "what you are going through is abuse." I remember feeling in shock but I let it all out. They helped me fill out my paperwork for parental rights and responsibilities but I never asked them to come to court with me. They were in the shadows supporting me. But the support, was life changing. I learned that it wasn't my fault. I learned that it wasn't because he needed mental health treatment. It was about control.

A few years later, he still wouldn't leave me alone. He used our daughter as a way to keep tabs on me. Calling to video chat at 10 PM when he had her because "she wanted to see mom" even though she should be asleep. Manipulating visits to try to keep control and

punish me. He started reaching out to anyone I knew. He started sending naked photos of himself to all my friends as a way to try to hurt me. It escalated. Hope and Justice was there to help me with a protection order I should have done years ago. They were with me through court. They were the calm in my storm. Then I learned that my daughter had been sexually assaulted by her grandfather on her father's side. The one that use to give my abuser tips. They had finally broke me. I felt so helpless. I felt like they had won. They had done the one thing that would devastate me. They hurt my baby girl I had tried so hard to protect. Hope and Justice Project helped support me through it all. They were there to listen, they were there when I cried. And oh my goodness, did I cry. They supported me during the protection order hearing. They were my constant, even when I utilized sexual assault services for the forensic exam. They advocated for me with law enforcement, CPS, and the DA's office. They were my voice when I had no voice left. They helped keep us safe. I worked with multiple advocates from Hope and Justice Project, and every single one of them felt like safety.

Hope and Justice Advocates are not just about supporting survivors in keeping them safe. They are the light that makes the darkness a little less scary. They are the keeper of stories that never get told. They provided me with emotional safety, free from judgement. They never told me what to do but helped me understand my options. They helped me understand that it was HIS choices, not mine. I was not to blame. They gave me my life back and empowered me to be so much stronger than I ever thought was possible. I never knew Hope and Justice existed until I needed them, but I am so thankful they were around when I did. There are so many more like me, waiting to tell their story. Without funding, the keeper of the stories fades way.