

## Testimony In Support of LD 875

My name is Christie Denzel. I live in Mount Desert, ME.

I was a victim of domestic violence. Domestic violence is violence that happens in the home. And to use the word "was"... "was" a victim... is my greatest victory. I am free and independent now, to the enormous effort of Next Step Domestic Violence Project. They were my literal lifeboat, helping me survive years of trying to protect my kids and try to get him out of our lives.

My husband abused me in my home, in front of my kids, over and over again. He controlled me through fear. Fear for myself and for my kids. I woke up every morning dreading the day and how he was going to treat me.

When you are abused by someone who lives in the same home as you, it is a dark scary unsafe place. Home is not a haven for you. It is not a place you go to feel safe from the rest of the world. It is a place you have to go, to take care of your kids, but you don't want to be there because it is not a safe place. The scariest place you go at the end of the day, is a bed, you share with your abuser. Home should not be a place you dread.

I am here, sharing this story, because people need to hear what about what is silenced behind closed doors. Silenced behind our society's belief that "what happens in a man's home is his business" mentality. Domestic violence is not a women's problem. It is not the question "why doesn't she just leave..." It is society's problem that we let this happen. The question is "why does he think he can treat another human being this way... why does he think he has a right to control another person through fear and violence..." I say he and him because the startling majority of domestic violence is perpetuated by men.

I am finally divorced... it took 3 years of court to finally be independent of him... I celebrate my personal "Declaration of Independence" every December 20th... although, to be clear, my abuse by him is not over. I was just in court, again, last Wednesday. This is our second court case since I was divorced. But at least he does not live in my home. My home is a haven for me and my children.

Next Step helped me understand the patterns of cohesive control, domestic violence, and how these men exert power and control in "their" homes. That helped me make sense of what was going on, break the silence, seek help, get help, and get my life back ...for me and my kids.

The value of our society in Maine and the United States can be measured by the resources allocated to help those most in need. I **am advocating for an increase to the States investment in domestic violence services.**

I was a victim for a very long time. I am now a survivor and fully plan to be for the rest of my life. Everyone has a right to feel safe in their own home. With extreme gratitude, I thank every helper in this room, for making our society a safer place ..and replacing fear...with empowered love and support.