



**Testimony of Jade Richards, Esq.
Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc.**

**Speaking in Support of LD 875
An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence**

Date of Public Hearing: March 19, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Jade Richards. I am a staff attorney in the Family Law and Victim Rights Unit at Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc., and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence.

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.

Since 1978, Pine Tree has had a dedicated attorney on staff focusing on Protection from Abuse cases. Over time, increased funding has allowed Pine Tree to expand the geographic scope and types of legal advocacy for victim/survivors to our current statewide programming for victims of domestic violence.

Pine Tree's survivor-centered legal programming is based on a model of close collaboration with domestic violence advocates. We accept referrals directly from advocates across the state. It is essential to our effective legal representation that survivors and families are connected to the range of supportive services provided by advocates.

Pine Tree attorneys work closely with advocates during the legal process and often refer clients to advocates for further support at the conclusion of our legal services. Our representation of survivors would not be nearly as efficient or effective without the advocate partners who work alongside Pine Tree attorneys in these cases.

Advocates provide support, help survivors navigate complex decisions, evaluate options, accompany survivors at court, connect survivors with resources, and provide information so that survivors can make informed decisions. The advocates that we work with every day are compassionate, dedicated, and truly make a difference for victim/survivors facing the most difficult moments of their lives. Advocate services also provide direct benefits to other systems, like the courts, by supporting survivors, connecting them with legal representation, assisting the courts by negotiating Protection from Abuse matters, and helping victim/survivors to understand and navigate the legal system.

For example, a domestic violence advocate referred a case to Pine Tree. That advocate attended Protection Order court with the victim/survivor to support the survivor through the court process so that the Pine Tree attorney was able to focus solely on the legal issues at hand. After the court proceedings concluded, the advocate was able to debrief with the client and offer support in the form of safety planning and assisting the client with filling out paperwork to apply for a childcare subsidy and other state benefits. Advocates are so incredibly important in assisting survivors in all the complex ways a survivor needs support either to leave an abusive situation, or to heal from the abuse that they have suffered.

Thank you to Representative Meyer and this committee. I urge you to support funding for these critical resources and pass LD 875. I am happy to answer any questions.