

Testimony of Penny Lou  
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 Penny Lou, I am from Aroostook County, and I am writing to share why support for this critical funding is so important.

I was asked to give a small explanation about myself and what Hope and Justice has done for me. With so many unwanted memories and painful emotions crawling back through me as I am typing, I will do my best to get my thoughts down. I cannot guarantee if this will all make sense to you as I try to swim by the memories and emotions, but for Hope and Justice, I will give it my all.

Hello, my name is Penny Lou, and I am a **SURVIVOR** of domestic violence. I was married for 25 years, 10 months and 22 days. I was with him 4 years prior to our marriage giving this a total of 29 years, 10 months and 22 days. Things were really good at the beginning, I was very happy with my life. I thought, "Wow, this is THE life." This is what I have always wanted.

We started off happy and things were going really great. He introduced me to his family, they seemed wonderful. I introduced him to my family, they were taken aback a bit but did not say anything. A few months into the relationship, I was warned by many people, who knew the family, of his siblings' upbringing and how his mother was treated by the father/husband in the home. How the father was extremely abusive toward them. I was a bit surprised since I did not notice anything on the fathers part. I would tell them, "He's not like his dad." Love's blindness was taking over.

Later on in our relationship as I started noticing little things, I questioned the mother, "Why not leave your husband?" Her response: FEAR, NO PLACE TO GO, NO MONEY AND NO SUPPORT FROM FAMILY. That hurt me just hearing her say that. There was no Hope and Justice or anything else at the time that I knew of. Anyways, four handsome boys later, MANY financial struggles, job changes on his part, bankruptcy, etc. lead to a lot of unwanted abuse. It was real. I was always led to ASSUME I did wrong, was made to FEEL I did wrong, I was ALWAYS in the wrong, told I would NOT GET ANYWHERE in life without him. As a woman and a mother, taking in the abuse and watching her boys listening and taking some abuse also was extremely painful. Now I understood how his mother felt.

We did couple therapy. He did all the talking, claiming victim to all of the problems we were having. I would sit there with tears in my eyes knowing what he was saying was not true. When I was asked something I would speak then he would cut me off blaming the victim again. What he did not like was when she wanted to speak to us separately, well there he stopped going saying therapy did not help, she doesn't know what she was talking about and I should stop going, but I continued. He questioned everything I spoke with her about and I would not tell him anything. **Wow! You want to talk about stoking a fire.** After speaking with her for a few months and making me understand that I am not to blame, I still was not 100% convinced. She asked if she could bring someone in at my next appointment to help convince me further. I agreed.

HOPE AND JUSTICE are my saviors, my safe haven. After listening to them speak at my appointment with my therapist and making me realize that the mental, verbal, emotional and sexual abuse are an act of domestic violence. You see, ever since I had back surgery I have restless leg syndrome. I am on medication that relaxes me, so I sleep. (As a woman when you wake up from your medicated sleep you know when something is not right with your body.) Hope and Justice taught me that unwanted sexual acts is physical abuse, especially when you give no consent. It did not only happen one time, trust me. Boy oh boy, did I do a lot of thinking and finally with their help I convinced myself.

I CAN go on without him. I placed my life and my four boys' lives in the hands of Hope and Justice. We had many meetings on how to set up our leave from the house, finding a place to live, getting a restraining order, setting the boys up to remain in their old school and letting the school know of certain situations and counseling if they needed it, getting me started with TANF, getting help for food, getting me help with divorce papers, etc. They would come at every mediation and court hearing just so I could feel secure with someone who knew ALL of what I went through. I definitely would not have been able to do this if Hope and Justice was not with me. It was their guidance and ironically their strong sense of HOPE that gave me my courage. I know if I did not have their support I would still be with THAT man. I definitely have my family's support, but they do not know all of what I went through and I do not want them to. There are just some things that are better not told to the family.

There is so much I want to say about Hope and Justice, but my brain is spitting it out faster than I can type. Whether meeting in the office or working on the hotline, these Advocates work such long hours making sure they are helping the victims of abuse, helping them through their struggles and their needs. Like with me, they have appointments with victims in their offices or they will meet with you someplace where you feel safe. There they can console, advise, and be your advocate. It is all done in private, like when I was married, he had no idea where I was and what my intentions were. I have even given the Hope and Justice hotline number and told several people who needed help and guidance to call. They were happy they called.

Hope and Justice are constantly looking for donations for personal items for women and children, daily supplies needed for the home, toys and everything baby and children, furniture, food and clothing. They constantly TRY to do fundraisers to help the women and children. I am sure they buy gas cards just so a mother can drive her child to the doctor or school. I bet they try to pay for building utilities, and building maintenance with whatever is left with the fundraiser....I do not know. But I am pretty sure what they make at a fundraiser will not pay for all of the maintenance and utilities. Sometimes the fundraiser is not a big enough amount to pay for certain things. Things that survivors need, like basic necessities, even to repair our appliances. Honestly, I do not know if my dryer is going to last any longer. A family of three and I will have no way to dry our clothing. How sad is that? All I know is they do a lot for a lot of women and children.

All I do know is I still continue to this day to seek advice from my Hope and Justice advocates. They are my everything. They saved my boys and myself. I do not want to say this but who is to say that someday it could be your Grandmother, Mother, Sister, Daughter, Aunt, Niece, Cousin, Friend and maybe Yourself that would need Hope Justice services. How many of them with children will stay in an abusive relationship because there is absolutely no funding. No funding leads them to no place

for them to go? Can you see women with their children running away and hiding in the streets from a violent man with no shelter and no food? Some of these relationships lead to death, God forbid.

Just remember this, domestic violence is everywhere. It could happen to anybody especially when children are involved. If there is no funding to help with domestic shelters where do the victims go? What do they do if they take off with no money? Who can they call? The questions can go on and on. Family and friends will not always be an option for some.

Put yourself in some of these shoes. Walk the streets and see how many women and children are out there hiding with no place to go. Imagine it being one of your family members out there or a friend. You have no idea until you have no option on where to go for safety. I will tell you one thing living in fear with the constant panic attacks that I had, Hope and Justice saved me and my boys. They will remain my forever Savior and Safe Haven.

For everything Hope and Justice offers, I sincerely hope you take into consideration every verbal and written testimony. They deserve the help, just like every woman and child they help. **Hope and Justice saves lives.**

Thank you for your time,

Penny Lou