

## Testimony in Support of LD 875

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Karina Beadling, I live in Belfast with my family and I am testifying in support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence.

I am a mother of four, a New England native and a former teacher with expertise in the field of language acquisition. I was raised in an supportive, academic family, relatively sheltered from and wholly unprepared for the adversity I ultimately encountered.

I say that last part because I am also a domestic violence survivor. And the truth is, I'm terrified to speak in front of you today.

Do you recognize me? Its unlikely that our paths have crossed, but I may have been your child's teacher, caretaker, your sever, the person who answers the phone when you call a business. How could you know the pain I carried? Why would that matter? As a domestic abuse survivor, I am just one of tens of thousands of women, men and children, walking amongst you with hidden scars from the years of abuse my children and I suffered. Writing this testimony is hard; Dredging up the memories of the times before New Hope came into our lives feels like watching an old movie about someone else. If I could, I would bury the past, I don't want to talk about it. My kids don't want to talk about it. That's not us anymore.

But we need to talk about this. We need to recognize that abuse exists behind closed doors all over Maine, every day, and for as dark as my past is, for as hard as it is to talk about these things, we must, because there are Mainers living in that place right now, who need the things that helped us and who will be hurt if funding is not reinstated by the powers of you all here today.

Let me share a little about how we got here today. I moved to Maine in 2018 with my three daughters to be with someone whom I thought was the man of my dreams. He was charming, handsome, and I had no reason to think otherwise.

We made the decision to move together to Winslow, Maine, where I immediately became isolated. Without any support in place, the proverbial mask fell away, and the relationship turned sour. I didn't have the tools to recognize how bad things were getting, and I couldn't leave, I began to feel sick from constant stress. My health suffered, and as COVID lockdown settled around us, things only got worse. I was far from friends and family, trying to care for my children, working as a high school teacher.. and immensely concerned with the changing needs of the people I was tasked with caring for.

As our country was becoming deeply polarized, so too was our home. He would use our value differences to criticize, belittle, and threaten me, telling me that my feelings were wrong. He would get angry and rip the internet router out of the wall and leave with it so the children couldn't do their online schooling and so I couldn't give my classes- acts I now recognize as coercive control. I was pregnant with our child and at the time, my greatest fears were a lack of stable housing for our baby, or losing my job or children, which he would leverage through threats of getting me fired, taking away my children, and leaving us homeless. At 9 months pregnant, I was teaching full time, and when I got home, he would already be drunk, telling me that he found me so unattractive he would have no choice but to end the relationship, telling me he expected me to pack and leave just days before our baby was due. The threats and menacing were relentless.

I think that often when people hear these kinds of stories, they wonder why someone would stay, why any smart person wouldn't just leave if things were so bad? The tendency is to dismiss the speaker, finding the circumstances uncomfortable, unimaginable and therefore non credible.. Well, that is a complicated part of the story- In my personal experience, even though I had always been of sound mind, the more I felt like things weren't right, the less I wanted to believe it, and self-deception actually became a survival mechanism. In a way, you actually start to believe the terrible things they say. Underneath the face I put on for my students every day, I was becoming deeply ashamed and scared. Ashamed that I, a loving mother, could not protect my children from the abuse we faced at home. Scared to tell anyone. Feeling like a failure, this once confident, outspoken woman was becoming insecure, delusional, and powerless.

Trying and failing to protect my kids, and trying and failing to move forward in a meaningful way were becoming untenable. Nobody listened, nobody understood.. I called out for help, and while some places were well-intending and sympathetic, or offered a support group or handmade mittens for the children, there just weren't meaningful resources for us. With a now infant son who I couldn't protect, I really started to lose my mother's mind. I ultimately had a mental breakdown that cost me my career and dignity.. At that point, I could have laid down and given up. But with my children watching, I realized I had no option but to move forward. so I pulled together every last bit of personal resources I had and left the town where I lived with my abuser, bringing my now four children to a farmhouse in Belfast where we could finally start to heal.

Although we had broken free, mentally, I was a mess, I couldn't work, couldn't relate to people apart from my children, I was in an endless cycle of therapy and appointments, of limitations and expectations, packing lunches and folding clothes...For the last decade, I had been on a professional trajectory to become a school director, but all my plans were derailed, and without everything I had worked for, I just didn't know who I was anymore. My personal resources were diminishing, and I didn't know what we were going to do to survive. The cost of housing and at the time heating oil had skyrocketed. I'll never forget when the oil bill came one month, probably February of 2021, and it was over \$800. I had no way to get help with that- I had no choice but to pay it, or my kids would freeze.

But no matter how hard things got on our own, I still knew in my heart that anything was better than where we were before, so I put all my energy into carving out small successes for my family. I had limited savings, and as they dwindled, I became deeply worried we would soon be homeless. Those days were hazy, because nothing seemed to alleviate the gnawing fear of looming homelessness. On the one hand, I was free from our abuser.. On the other hand, he still had a hold on us because leaving meant we were thrown into an unsustainable tailspin . I wanted so badly to heal, but everything reminded me of the trauma we faced.

As my hope for a brighter future started to hit reality, fear mounted for the future of my family. I began to connect to the community, and in a moment of breakthrough, we found New Hope... something that changed the course of my family's lives

I'll be honest, when I first dialed New Hope, I really thought it was another useless call. But after some time getting to know the organization, and them getting to know us, We eventually met Shelley, our advocate, who interviewed us and assessed our needs in a way that nobody had before. Shelley listened, and I felt heard, I felt believed. After years of being manipulated and chasing dead ends or insincere actors, it was difficult at first to believe that anyone cared or could actually do anything. Shelley soon shared the incredible news that she was able to enroll our family in a housing program, which covered our housing costs, moving expenses, and even helped us to get some things for the new, \*OUR new home. For my four children and I, this was an incredible and almost immediate relief. Not only would my children

and I not be homeless, but For the first time I felt like I could stop fighting, and focus on what mattered, which was to heal and nurture the family, ensuring a bright future for them.. In the time that New Hope (and later, MCEdV) provided housing assistance (and so much other support, from clothing to Christmas gifts,) my four children have absolutely flourished.

My oldest daughter is about to graduate from her charter high school, just bought her first car, is professionally directing plays, and plans to go to USM to be an art teacher. My second daughter Malia, is valedictorian of her class, with ambitions of becoming an architect, my daughter Shiloh is becoming a bird and mushroom expert, and my son Roam, at age 4, is extremely intelligent. I could go on forever about how well they have done on the other side of recovering from abuse; but to keep it short, These are all kids who I am proud to say will be part of Maine's future.

And that's the part I think we need to emphasize. In these times of tightening belts, of looming budgets, we need to place limited resources in places that matter.. Being fiscally conservative or financially savvy means seeking to minimize liabilities, increase assets, to seek maximum dividends from investments. But what greater dividend than an improved statewide social fabric? Of healthy children driving the future? Many great economists have quantified the heavy costs of poverty and trauma on populations, likewise formulating dividend models for social investments. I am a language expert, not an economist, not a lawmaker, and without undermining the nuance and expertise of those fields, I can tell you that before Domestic violence survivor support came into our lives, my four children likely would have wound up being a liability to our state and local communities. Afterwards, I am proud and confident in saying that they will absolutely be an asset to Maine's future.

I implore you to use the power you have today to make the right decision and restore funding for domestic violence services for Maine families like mine. Investing in families, individuals, and futures is just one small way we can work together to ensure a brighter Maine future. Thank you.