

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 Malia DeGracia Beadling. I live in Belfast, Maine, and I'm testifying in support of LD 875, an act to fund essential services for victims of domestic violence.

I am here today because I was 9 years old when I experienced the effects of domestic violence on my household for the first time. I'm 16 now, turning 17 in the summer, and in September of this year, it will mark 5 years since me, my siblings, and my mother officially managed to escape our abuser. Despite the passage of time, every day still feels like a never-ending uphill battle to reclaim the sanctity of our small family. I am extremely grateful for the life I have had the privilege to lead since we left; I'm currently valedictorian of my class, a double season varsity athlete, and am living in a wonderful, supportive community but there was a time in my life where I was living in hotels while inbetween housing, nearly failing out of school because I was never in class, and praying every night that I would wake up alive.

I was 10 years old the first time I called the police on him after finding my mother curled into the fetal position, crying with someone who should've been akin to a father figure standing over her and recording. I say first because there would be many times to follow, and each time, law enforcement did little to nothing to help. This was also the year that my mother ended up moving us into a home with him, an entire state away from the only family and friends we had ever known. As a Spanish teacher in a small town who was coming out of homelessness, my mother didn't have much of a choice, but things only seemed to get worse. I was 11 when the four of us were kicked out of our own home on Christmas day and forced to spend what should've been a cozy family meal at a random Chinese takeout restaurant on the side of Route 1 on the way to my grandparents' house. We survived like this for a few years, the incidents never faltering, and my mom knew how badly things needed to change but had no means to leave and start over with 3 kids and a, now, newborn baby on the way. This was until she found out that some programs and places helped people in our exact situation, and because of the funding they provided us with, we managed to find a place where we were able to be safe and happy as a family.

This is nowhere near our full story, but this is all to say that the only- and I want to emphasize this- *only* reason we were able to get out of that situation was because of programs like New Hope Midcoast and other similar domestic violence advocacy services supporting us through every step of the process. Living through domestic violence is hard, but the reality for many people like us is that getting help is even harder, and without the necessary support and funding, this will become unattainable for those in who need it the most. There are, on average, over 1,500 domestic violence-related homicides in the United States each year, so please, I urge you all to consider the fact that 4 million is not just a number on a spreadsheet but real people and family's well-beings, and how important it is to unconditionally support these life saving resources. Thank you for your time today.